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Balzac c.1
The magic skin

CENTRAL

Honoré de Balzac

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

The Human Comedy

PHILOSOPHIC AND ANALYTIC STUDIES

VOLUME I

IN THE CURIOSITY SHOP

The young man rose suddenly and manifested some surprise when he saw hanging to the wall above the chair on which he had been sitting, a piece of shagreen, *no larger than a fox's skin; but, by a phenomenon inexplicable at first glance, the skin projected such vivid rays of light into the darkness that reigned in the shop, that you would have said it was a small comet.*

The *Edition Définitive* of the *Comédie Humaine* by HONORÉ DE BALZAC, now for the first time completely translated into English.

THE MAGIC SKIN. IN ONE VOLUME. TRANSLATED BY GEORGE BURNHAM IVES, AND ILLUSTRATED WITH FOUR ETCHINGS.

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THE MAGIC SKIN

TO MONSIEUR SAVARY

Member of the Academy of Sciences

STERNE. *Tristram Shandy*, ch. cccxxii.

I

THE TALISMAN

*

Toward the close of the month of October, 1829, a young man entered the Palais-Royal just at the hour when the gambling-houses opened, conformably to the law that protects a passion essentially susceptible to taxation. Without overmuch hesitation, he ascended the staircase of the establishment designated by the number 36.

"Your hat, monsieur, if you please!" exclaimed, in a sharp, querulous voice, a pale, unhealthy little old man, who was crouching in the shadow behind a barrier, and suddenly rose displaying a countenance moulded upon an ignoble pattern.

When you enter a gambling-house, the law begins by robbing you of your hat. Is that an evangelical, divine parable? Is it not rather a method of driving an infernal bargain with you by demanding some sort of a pledge? Can it be for the purpose of compelling you to maintain a respectful attitude in the presence of those who have designs upon your money? Is it that the police, who lie in hiding in all the cesspools of society, are anxious to know the name of your hatmaker, or your own if you happen to have written it in the crown? Or is it the object

of the law to obtain the measure of your skull and prepare useful statistical tables concerning the cerebral capacity of gamblers? Upon that point the management maintains a discreet silence. But mark this—no sooner have you taken a step toward the green cloth than your hat has ceased to belong to you as absolutely as you have ceased to belong to yourself: you and your money, your headgear, your cane, and your cloak, are the property of the game. When you leave the place, the *Game* will show you, by a heartless epigram in action, that it leaves you something, by restoring your paraphernalia. If, however, you happen to have a new hat, you will learn at your expense that a gambler must wear a gambler's costume.

The surprise exhibited by the young man when he received a numbered slip in exchange for his hat, the brim of which luckily was somewhat frayed, clearly indicated a still uncorrupted mind; so that the little old man, who doubtless had grovelled from his childhood in the effervescent pleasures of the gambler's life, cast upon him a dull glance, utterly lacking in warmth, in which a philosopher would have detected the misery of the hospital, the vagabond lives of ruined men, the judicial reports of a host of asphyxiations, hard labor for life, deportations to Guazacoalco. That man, whose long, white face was no longer fed by aught save Darcet's gelatinous soups, presented the pallid image of passion reduced to its simplest terms. In his wrinkles there were traces of long-continued torture, he evidently gambled

away his meagre wages on the day he received them. Like a used-up nag upon whom the whip no longer has any effect, nothing startled him; the hollow groans of the gamblers who left the place ruined, their voiceless imprecations, their wild glances found him always insensible. He was Gambling incarnate. If the young man had taken heed of that melancholy Cerberus, perhaps he would have said to himself: "There is nothing but a pack of cards left in that heart!" But the stranger did not listen to that living counsel, stationed there doubtless by Providence, just as it has stationed disgust before the door of all evil places. He resolutely entered the hall, where the ring of gold exerted an irresistible fascination over the senses aflame with covetousness. The young man was probably drawn there by the most logical of all the eloquent phrases of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of which this, I think, is the sad meaning: *Yes, I can understand that a man may gamble, but only when there is naught but his last crown between him and death.*

In the evening, the gambling-hells have only a vulgar sort of poetry, but its effect is as certain as that of a bloodthirsty drama. The rooms are filled with spectators and gamblers, with impoverished old men, who drag themselves thither to warm themselves, with agitated faces, with debauches begun in wine and on the point of ending in the Seine. Although passion abounds there, the too great multitude of actors prevents you from contemplating the demon of play face to face. It is a genuine *ensemble*

passage, in which the whole troupe sings its loudest and each instrument in the orchestra helps to swell the volume of sound. You will see many honorable people who go thither in search of distraction and pay for it as they would pay for the pleasure of witnessing a play or feasting bountifully, or as they would visit an attic chamber to purchase at a low price painful regrets for three months. But do you realize how excited and perturbed a man's mind must be when he is impatiently awaiting the opening of a gambling-hell? Between the morning gambler and the evening gambler there is the same difference that exists between the indifferent husband and the lover fainting beneath his charmer's windows. Only in the morning comes ardent passion, and need in its outspoken ghastliness. In the morning, you may contemplate with admiration a veritable gambler, a gambler who has not eaten, slept, thought, or lived, he has been so roughly castigated by the lash of his combination, has suffered such torment from the itching of a lucky coup at *trente-et-quarante*. At that accursed hour you will meet eyes whose calmness is terrifying, faces that fascinate you, glances that lift up the cards and devour them. So it is that gambling-houses are really sublime only at their opening for the day. Spain may have its bull-fights, Rome may have had its gladiators, but Paris plumes itself upon its Palais-Royal, whose enticing roulette-tables afford the pleasure of seeing blood flow in streams with no danger that the feet of the pit will slip in it. Try to

cast a stealthy glance at that arena,—enter!—What bareness! The walls, covered with a greasy paper to the height of a man's head, do not present a single image to refresh the mind. There is not even a nail to make suicide easy. The floor is worn and dirty. An oblong table occupies the centre of the room. The simple style of the cane-seated chairs crowded around that cloth worn smooth by gold, denotes strange indifference to luxury on the part of men who come there to die in quest of fortune and luxury. This contradiction may be detected wherever the mind reacts powerfully upon itself. The lover wishes to clothe his mistress in silk or in soft Oriental stuffs, and, as a general rule, he possesses her upon a straw pallet. The ambitious man dreams that he has attained the highest pinnacle of power, while he grovels in the mire of servility. The tradesman moulders away in the depths of a damp, unhealthy shop, and builds a huge palace, from which his son, too eager for his inheritance, will be expelled by his brothers and sisters by process of law. In fact, is there anything more unpleasant to contemplate than a house of pleasure? Strange problem! Always at odds with himself, deceiving his hopes by his present ills, and his ills by a future which does not belong to him, man impresses upon all his acts the stamp of inconsistency and weakness. In this world nothing is complete save misfortune.

When the young man entered the room, a few gamblers were already there. Three bald-headed old men were sitting, with apparent nonchalance,

about the green cloth; their plaster-like faces, impassive as a diplomatist's, were indicative of surfeited souls, hearts that had long since forgotten how to beat, even when risking a woman's paraphernalia. A young Italian, with black hair and olive complexion, was leaning tranquilly on his elbows at the end of the table, and seemed to be listening to the secret presentiments that call to a gambler in fatal tones: "Yes!—No!" That southern face breathed gold and fire. Seven or eight spectators, standing in line so as to form a sort of audience, awaited the scenes that were being made ready for them by the strokes of chance, the faces of the actors, and the movements of the gold and the croupier's rakes. Those idlers stood there as silent, as motionless, and as intent as the multitude on the Place de Grève when the headsman slices off a head. A tall, thin man, in a threadbare coat, held a memorandum-book in one hand, and in the other a pin to mark the times that the *red* or *black* won. He was one of those modern Tantaluses who live on the edge of all the enjoyments of their epoch, one of those misers without a hoard who play an imaginary stake; a sort of sane madman, who dealt with vice and danger as young priests deal with the eucharist when they say white masses. Facing the bank were one or two shrewd speculators, experts in calculating the chances in gambling, and, like ex-convicts, with no fear of the galleys, who had come to venture three stakes and depart at once with their probable gains, upon which they lived. Two old

attendants were walking carelessly back and forth with folded arms, and from time to time looked out into the garden from the windows, as if to show their expressionless faces to the passers-by as a sort of sign. The *dealer* and the *banker* had just cast upon the expectant punters the stolid glance that freezes their blood, and said, in a shrill voice: "Make your bets!" when the young man opened the door. The silence became deeper, so to speak, and every head turned curiously toward the new-comer. Strange to say, the spiritless old men, the stony employés, the spectators, and even the fanatical Italian—one and all, when they saw the stranger, felt an indefinable thrill of terror. Must not one be very unfortunate to evoke pity, very weak to arouse a sympathetic feeling, or of a very forbidding aspect to cause a shudder in the hearts of the people in that hell, where sorrow should be dumb, where misery is joyous and despair self-contained? Well, there were all those emotions in the novel sensation that stirred those petrified hearts when the young man entered. But did not the headsmen sometimes shed tears over the maidens whose fair heads were to be cut off at a signal from the Revolution?

At the first glance, the gamblers read upon the novice's face some horrible mystery; his youthful features were instinct with vague charm, his glance bore witness to abortive efforts, a thousand defeated hopes! The listless impassiveness of the suicide gave a dull, sickly pallor to that brow, a bitter smile caused slight wrinkles at the corners of the mouth,

and the features expressed a resignation pitiful to see. Traces of hidden genius sparkled in the depths of those eyes, veiled, perhaps, by the fatigues of dissipation. Was it debauchery that had set its hideous seal upon that noble face, once pure and blooming, now degenerate? Physicians would doubtless have attributed to lesions of the heart or lungs the yellow circles about the eyes and the flush upon the cheeks, while poets would have pretended to recognize by those signs the ravages of knowledge, the traces of nights passed in study by lamplight. But a passion more deadly than disease, a disease more pitiless than studious toil or the fire of genius, distorted those youthful features, contracted those energetic muscles, tortured that heart which debauches, study, and disease had only breathed upon. As, when a famous criminal reaches the galleys, the convicts welcome him with respect, so all those human demons, experts in suffering, saluted an unfamiliar form of suffering, a deep wound which their glances probed, and recognized a prince of their own people by the majesty of his dumb irony, by the fashionable poverty of his dress. The young man had a stylish frock-coat, but the junction between his waistcoat and his cravat was too carefully preserved to admit the possibility of any linen underneath. His hands, which were as small and well-shaped as a woman's, were of doubtful cleanliness; indeed, for two days past he had worn no gloves! If even the dealer and the attendants shuddered, it was because some vestiges of the charms of youthful innocence still

bloomed in the graceful outlines, in the naturally curly, thin, fair hair. The face was still the face of a man of twenty-five, and vice seemed to be only an accident therein. The vigorous current of youthful life was still struggling with the ravages of impotent lust. Darkness and light, nullity and existence were fighting fiercely therein, causing fascination and horror at once. The young man appeared like an angel without a halo, who had lost his way. So it was that all those professors *emeriti* of vice and degradation, like a toothless old hag moved to pity at the sight of a lovely maiden entering upon a career of shame, were near crying out to the novice: "Begone!" He walked straight to the table, stood beside it, tossed carelessly upon the cloth a gold piece which he had in his hand, and which rolled upon the black; then, abhorring illusory uncertainties, like all men of strong mind, he glanced at the dealer with an expression at once agitated and calm. The interest in his play was so absorbing that the old men neglected to stake anything; but the Italian, with the frenzy of passion, grasped an idea that smiled upon him, and punted his store of gold in opposition to the stranger's stake. The banker forgot to utter the sacramental phrases, which eventually degenerate into a hoarse, unintelligible cry: "Make your bets!—The play is made!—No more bets!" The dealer laid out the cards and seemed to wish the last-comer good luck, indifferent as he was to the losses or gains of those who indulged in that baleful pastime. Every spectator

chose to descry a drama and the last scene of a noble life in the fate of that gold piece; their eyes, fixed upon the fatal cards, sparkled brightly; but, despite the attention with which they looked alternately at the young man and the cards, they could detect no symptom of emotion on his cold, resigned face.

"Red, even," announced the dealer, officially.

A sort of dull, rattling sound issued from the Italian's throat, as the folded notes that the banker tossed him fell one by one in front of him. As for the young man, he did not realize his loss until the rake was put forth to gather in his last napoleon. The ivory caused the piece to produce a sharp, ringing sound, as it went, swift as an arrow, across the board and joined the pile of gold heaped up in front of the bank. The stranger softly closed his eyes, his lips turned white; but he soon raised his eyes, his lips resumed the redness of coral, he assumed the air of an Englishman for whom life no longer has any mysteries, and disappeared, without begging for consolation, with one of those heart-rending glances that gamblers in desperation often cast upon the spectators. How many events are crowded into a second's space, into a throw of the dice!

"I suppose that was his last cartridge," said the croupier, with a smile, after a moment's pause, during which he held the gold piece between his thumb and forefingers to show it to the assembled company.

"A crack-brained fellow, who will go and throw himself into the water," replied an habitué, glancing at the gamblers about him, all of whom knew one another.

"Bah!" cried one of the attendants, taking a pinch of snuff.

"If we had only followed monsieur's example!" said one of the old men to his colleagues, pointing to the Italian.

Everybody looked at the lucky gambler, whose hands trembled as he counted his bank-notes.

"I heard," he said, "a voice that shouted in my ear: 'The game will win against that young man's despair!'"

"He's no gambler," replied the banker; "if he had been, he'd have divided his money into three piles so as to have more chances."

The young man went out without claiming his hat; but the old watch-dog, observing the vagabond's evil plight, handed it to him without a word; the gambler mechanically gave up the check and went down the stairs, whistling *Di tanti palpiti* in such a feeble tone that he could hardly hear the lovely notes himself.

He soon found himself under the galleries of the Palais-Royal, walked as far as Rue Saint-Honoré, turned toward the Tuileries, and crossed the garden at an uncertain gait. He walked as if he were in the middle of a desert, jostled by men whom he did not see, listening, amid the hum of the multitude, to a single voice, the voice of death; plunged in benumbing meditation comparable to that in which criminals were often absorbed as they were drawn in the tumbrils from the Palais to the Place de Grève, to the scaffold red with all the blood shed since 1793.

There is something grand and awful in suicide.

The falls of a multitude of people are devoid of danger, like those of children, who fall from too near the ground to injure themselves; but when a great man falls, he must fall from a great height, from the skies to which he has soared and where he has caught a glimpse of some inaccessible paradise. Ruthless, indeed, must be the tempests that compel him to seek peace of mind at the muzzle of a pistol. How many youthful talents are mouldering away confined in garrets, perishing for lack of a friend, of a wife to console, surrounded by a million of human beings, in the centre of a multitude weary of gold and suffering the tortures of *ennui!* From that point of view, suicide assumes colossal proportions. Between voluntary death and the pregnant hope whose voice summons a young man to Paris, God knows how great a multitude of promising conceptions, poetic thoughts abandoned, stifled shrieks of despair, fruitless struggles, and still-born masterpieces crowd on one another's heels. Every suicide is a sublime poem of melancholy. Where will you find, in the vast sea of literature, a book swimming on the surface which can compare for true genius with this newspaper paragraph?

"Yesterday, at four o'clock, a young woman threw herself into the Seine from Pont des Arts."

In the face of that Parisian laconism, dramas, novels, everything fades into insignificance, even the old frontispiece: *The Lamentations of the glorious king*

of Kaërnavan, imprisoned by his children; the last remaining fragment of a lost book which brought tears to the eyes of Sterne, who himself abandoned his wife and children. The unknown was assailed by innumerable thoughts of that nature, which passed in fragments through his mind, as tattered flags flutter in the midst of a battle. If he chanced to lay aside for an instant the burden of his intelligence and his memory and to pause in front of some flower whose head swayed gently in the wind amid the clumps of verdure, he was soon seized by a convulsion of the life that still struggled under the crushing thought of suicide, and raised his eyes skyward; there the grayish clouds, the puffs of wind laden with melancholy, and the heavy atmosphere, all seemed to counsel death. He went on to Pont Royal, thinking of the last caprices of his predecessors. He smiled as he remembered that Lord Castlereagh satisfied the humblest of our needs before cutting his throat, and that Auger the academician paused on the road to self-destruction to look for his snuff-box and take a pinch of snuff. He was meditating upon those curious freaks and questioning his own mind, when, as he pressed close against the parapet of the bridge to allow a burly porter to pass, he surprised himself in carefully shaking off the dirt with which the man, as he passed, slightly soiled his coat-sleeve. When he reached the highest point of the arch, he stopped and looked down at the water with a sinister expression.

"Bad weather for drowning yourself," said a

ragged old woman, with a laugh. "See how cold and dirty the Seine is!"

He answered with an artless smile that bore witness to the delirious nature of his courage; but suddenly he shuddered as he saw in the distance, over the landing of the Tuileries, the little building with the sign on top bearing these words in letters a foot long: HELP FOR THE SUFFOCATED. Monsieur Dacheux appeared before him, in his armor of philanthropy, arousing and setting in motion the charitable oars that bruise the heads of the drowning when they are unfortunate enough to come to the surface; he seemed to see him stirring up the bystanders, sending for a doctor, preparing his fumigating apparatus; he read the lamentations of the reporters, written between the pleasures of a banquet and the smiles of a ballet-dancer; he heard the ring of the silver pieces counted out to the boatmen by the prefect of police, for his head. Dead, he was worth fifty francs; but, living, he was only a man of talent without patrons, without friends, without a bed to lie on, with no one to sing his praises, a veritable social cipher, useless to the State, which did not give him a thought. Death in broad daylight seemed shameful to him, he determined to die during the night, in order to leave an unrecognizable corpse to that society which failed to appreciate the grandeur of his life. He walked on, therefore, toward Quai Voltaire, affecting the lazy gait of a lounger seeking to kill time. When he went down the stairs at the end of the footway of the bridge, to the corner of the

quay, his attention was attracted by the old books displayed on the parapet; he came within an ace of bargaining for some of them. He smiled, philosophically put his hands back in his pockets, and had resumed his careless sauntering in which there was a suggestion of cold scorn, when he was amazed to hear several coins jingling in truly fantastic fashion in the depths of a pocket. A smile of hope illumined his features, stole from his lips over his whole face, made his gloomy eyes and cheeks gleam with joy. That spark of happiness resembled the glow that lights up the remains of paper already consumed by fire; but the face suffered the fate of the ashes, it grew dark once more, when the unknown, withdrawing his hand quickly from his pocket, discovered three sous.

"Ah! my kind monsieur, *la carita! la carita! Catarina!* Only a sou to buy some bread!"

A young chimney-sweep, his bloated cheeks black, his body dyed with soot, his clothes in rags, held out his hand to the young man to beg for his last remaining sous.

Two steps from the little Savoyard was a poor, miserable, diseased old man, wretchedly clad in clothes made of old torn hangings, who said to him, in a deep, hoarse voice:

"Monsieur, give me *whatever you please*, and I will pray for you—"

But when the young man looked in his face, the old man held his peace and ceased to ask alms, detecting, it may be, upon that woe-begone face the

tokens of a destitution even more bitter than his own.

"*La carita! la carita!*"

The unknown tossed his money to the child and the old pauper, as he left the footway and walked toward the houses; he could endure no longer the painful sight of the Seine.

"We will pray God to give you long life," said the two beggars.

As he passed the show-window of a dealer in engravings, the moribund youth met a young woman just alighting from a handsome carriage. He gazed delightedly at the lovely creature whose white face was becomingly framed by the satin trimmings of a stylish hat. He was fascinated by her slender figure and graceful motions. Her dress, raised slightly by the carriage step, afforded a glimpse of a leg whose charming shape was outlined by a tight-fitting white stocking. The young woman entered the shop and looked at albums and collections of lithographs; her purchases amounted to several louis, and the gold pieces sparkled and rang on the counter. The young man, who stood at the door apparently engrossed by the pictures displayed in the window, bestowed upon the fair stranger the most piercing glance of which a man's eyes are capable, in exchange for one of the careless glances cast at random upon the chance passer-by. It was, on his part, a farewell to love, to woman! but that last, potent glance was not understood, it caused no thrill in that frivolous woman's heart, did not make her

blush or cast down her eyes. What was it to her? one more tribute of admiration, one more desire aroused, which would suggest to her at night the pleasing reflection: "I looked well to-day." The young man quickly turned his eyes upon another frame, and did not look around when the stranger returned to her carriage. The horses trotted away, that last vision of luxury and fashion vanished as his life was about to vanish. He walked along by the shops at a melancholy pace, examining the specimens of merchandise with little interest. When the shops came to an end, he scrutinized the Louvre, the Institute, the towers of Notre-Dame, those of the Palais, the Pont des Arts. Those monuments seemed to assume a melancholy expression, reflecting the grayish hue of the sky, whose infrequent patches of blue imparted a threatening aspect to Paris, which, like a pretty woman, is subject to inexplicable alternations of ugliness and beauty. Thus even nature conspired to plunge the moribund into a chaos of painful agitation. A prey to the maleficent power whose solvent action finds a vehicle in the fluid that circulates in our nerves, he felt that his organism was approaching by insensible degrees a condition in which it began to exhibit the phenomena of fluidity. The tortures of that species of death-agony imparted to his walk a movement like that of the waves, and caused him to see buildings and men through a mist in which everything seemed to be swimming. He tried to avoid the titillation produced by the reaction of his physical nature upon his mind, and bent his

steps toward the shop of a dealer in antiquities with the purpose of affording pasturage to his senses and of passing the time until nightfall haggling over the price of objects of art. He went in quest of courage, so to speak, and to seek a cordial, like the criminal who distrusts his strength as he starts for the scaffold; but the knowledge of his impending death momentarily restored to the young man the courage of a duchess who has two lovers, and he entered the curiosity-shop with a careless manner, and a smile as fixed as a drunken man's on his lips. Was he not drunken with life, or perhaps with death? He soon relapsed into his vertiginous condition, and continued to see things under strange colors, or with a slight apparent movement, doubtless attributable to faulty circulation of the blood, which sometimes bubbled and foamed like a waterfall, and again was as calm and lifeless as lukewarm water. He simply asked permission to look through the rooms to see if he could find some rarities that might take his fancy. A red-haired youth, with a fresh, chubby face, and wearing an otter-skin cap on his head, left the shop in charge of an old peasant woman, a sort of female Caliban employed in cleaning a stove whose wonders were due to the genius of Bernard Palissy; then he said, carelessly, to the stranger:

"Now, monsieur! We have nothing but ordinary things down here; but if you care to take the trouble to go up to the first floor, I can show you some very fine mummies from Cairo, several pieces of incrusted pottery, some carved ebony, *genuine Renaissance*,

just come in, and the prettiest things you ever saw."

In the ghastly situation in which the unknown youth then was, that salesman's chatter, those absurd mercantile phrases, were to him like the paltry fault-finding with which narrow-minded mortals torture a man of genius. Bearing his cross to the bitter end, he pretended to listen to his guide and answered with gestures or monosyllables; but he gradually succeeded in earning the right to be silent, and was able to abandon himself unreservedly to his final reflections, which were truly terrible. He was a poet, and his mind chanced to fall in with a pasture of vast extent: he was destined to see in anticipation the bones of twenty worlds.

*

At the first glance, the warerooms presented a confused picture, wherein all manner of works, divine and human, brushed elbows with one another. Stuffed crocodiles, monkeys, and boa-constrictors smiled upon stained-glass windows from churches, seemed eager to snap at marble busts, to run after lacquered vases, or to climb on chandeliers. A Sèvres urn, on which Madame Jacotot had painted the features of Napoléon, stood beside a sphinx dedicated to Sesostris. The beginning of the world and events of yesterday hobnobbed in grotesque good-fellowship. A turnspit lay upon a monstrance, a republican sabre upon an arquebus of the Middle Ages. Madame du Barry, painted in pastel by Latour, with a star upon her head, nude and swathed in clouds, seemed to be gazing lustfully at an Indian *chibouque* and trying to divine the utility of the spiral convolutions of the stem. Instruments of death, poniards, odd pistols, arms with secret springs, were tossed pell-mell among instruments of life: porcelain tureens, Dresden plates, transparent cups from China, antique salt-cellars, feudal sweetmeat-boxes. An ivory ship was sailing under a cloud of canvas on the back of a motionless tortoise. A pneumatic machine put out one eye of the majestically impassive Emperor Augustus. Several portraits of French sheriffs, Dutch burgomasters, no more inert than during their lives, rose

above that chaos of antiquities, casting a cold and colorless glance upon them. All the countries of the earth seemed to have brought thither some remnant of their learning, a specimen of their arts. It was a species of philosophical dungheap in which nothing was lacking, neither the calumet of the red man, nor the green and gold slipper of the seraglio, nor the yataghan of the Moor, nor the Tartar idol. There were even the soldier's tobacco-pouch, the priest's pyx, plumes from a throne. These extraordinary pictures were exposed also to innumerable accidents of light, by the strange freaks of a multitude of reflections due to the confusion of shadows, to the abrupt transitions from daylight to darkness. The ear fancied that it heard broken cries, the mind that it divined unfinished dramas, the eye that it saw ill-concealed flashes. A persistent dust, too, had cast its light veil over all those objects whose multiplied angles and numberless sinuosities produced the most picturesque effects.

The unknown at first compared those three rooms, filled to overflowing with civilization, with divinities, with cults, with masterpieces, with royalties, with scenes of debauchery, with reason and with folly, to a mirror with many facets, each one of which represented a world. After that misty impression, he attempted to select those objects that pleased him most; but, by dint of looking, of thinking, of dreaming, he fell under the spell of a fever due, perhaps, to the hunger that was gnawing at his entrails. The sight of such a multitude of national or individual

lives, attested by those human pledges which survived them, completed the process of benumbing the young man's senses; the longing that had impelled him to visit the shop was gratified: he turned his back upon real life, ascended gradually toward an ideal world, and reached the enchanted palaces of delirium, where the universe appeared to him in fragments and in shafts of fire, as Saint John, long ago in Patmos, saw the future pass in flame and smoke before his eyes.

A multitude of faces, sorrowful, gracious, and terrible, obscure and clear, distant and close at hand, rose before him in crowds, in myriads, in generations. Egypt, rigid and mystery-laden, reared her head from her sands, represented by a mummy swathed in black bands; then there were the Pharaohs burying whole peoples in order to build themselves a tomb, and Moses and the Hebrews and the desert—he caught glimpses of a whole world, ancient and awe-inspiring. A marble statue, smooth and white, perched upon a twisted column and gleaming with purity, spoke to him of the sensual myths of the Greeks and of Ionia. Ah! who would not have smiled as he did to see, upon the red background of an Etruscan vase of finest clay, the nut-brown maiden dancing before the god Priapus, to whom she joyously waved her hand? Close by, a queen of the Latins lovingly caressed her Chimera! The capricious fancies of imperial Rome were all displayed—the bath, the couch, the toilet of a slothful, dreamy Julia, awaiting her Tibullus. The head of Cicero, armed with

the power of Arabian talismans, evoked memories of free Rome and unrolled before him the pages of Titus Livius. The young man gazed upon the *Senatus populusque Romanus:* the consul, the lictors, the togas edged with purple, the contests in the Forum, the angry populace, defiled slowly before him like vague figures of a dream. The works of Christian Rome dominated those heathen images. One picture opened the gates of heaven; he saw the Virgin Mary, bathed in a cloud of gold, amid the angels, eclipsing the sun in glory, listening to the lamentations of the unfortunate upon whom the regenerate Eve smiled sweetly. As he touched a mosaic made of the different lavas of Vesuvius and Ætna, his mind darted away to hot, sunny Italy: he took part in the orgies of the Borgias, journeyed through the Abruzzi, sighed for Italian damsels, fell passionately in love with their white faces and long, black eyes. He shuddered at the thought of nocturnal meetings interrupted by a husband's pitiless blade, when he spied a dagger dating from the Middle Ages, whose hilt resembled the finest lacework, and upon which were spots of rust resembling blood-stains. India and its religions were brought to mind by an idol in its pointed hat with raised squares, and decked out with bells, and clad in silk and gold. Near by the ugly creature, a mat, pretty as the gipsy who once rolled herself in it, still exhaled the odor of sandal-wood. A monster from China, with eyes distorted, twisted mouth, and crooked limbs, aroused the mind to admiration of the inventive genius of a people

who, weary of a beauty always the same, find ineffable joy in the vast resources of ugliness. A salt-cellar from the studio of Benvenuto Cellini carried him back to the bosom of the Renaissance, to the epoch when art and license flourished, when sovereigns sought diversion in the infliction of the death-penalty, when members of church councils, lying in the arms of courtesans, decreed chastity for simple priests. He saw upon a cameo the conquests of Alexander, the massacres of Pizarro in an old-fashioned arquebus, the religious wars, frenzied, raging, and pitiless, in the depths of a helmet. Then the laughing images of chivalry gushed out upon him from a suit of Milanese armor, richly damascened, well polished, beneath whose vizor the eyes of a paladin still gleamed.

That ocean of articles of furniture, inventions, fashions, works of art, and ruins, composed for him an endless poem. Shapes, colors, thoughts, all lived again therein; but nothing complete presented itself to his mind. It was for the poet to perfect the sketches of the great painter who had made that vast palette on which the innumerable accidents of human life were thrown in profusion, with the utmost disdain. After taking possession of the world, after gazing upon countries, epochs, reigns, the young man returned to individual existences. He personified himself anew and seized upon details, abandoning the life of nations as too overwhelming for a single man.

There slept an infant in wax, rescued from the

cabinet of Ruysch, and the fascinating creature reminded him of the joys of his childhood. At the witching sight of the virginal waistcloth of some Tahitian maiden, his ardent imagination depicted the simple life of nature, the chaste nakedness of true modesty, the joys of indolence, so natural to mankind,—a whole peaceful life idled away on the bank of a cool, dreamy brook, beneath a plantain-tree which, uncared for by man, gave forth a delicious manna. But suddenly he became a corsair and donned the awe-inspiring poesy that signalizes the rôle of Lara, inspired in a twinkling by the pearly hues of a multitude of shells, and intensified at the sight of some corals which smelt of sea-wrack, algæ, and hurricanes at sea. Farther on, gazing in admiration at the graceful miniatures, arabesques of gold and azure that adorned some priceless manuscript missal, he forgot the tumults of the ocean. Gently rocked by peaceful thoughts, he espoused study and learning anew, longed for the placid life of monks, exempt from chagrin, exempt from pleasure, and in imagination he lay down to sleep in a monastic cell, looking out through its ogive window upon the fields and forests and vineyards of his monastery. Before a picture of Teniers, he donned a soldier's helmet or shared the poverty of a laborer; he aspired to wear the dirty, smoky cap of the Flemings, he drank himself tipsy with beer, he played cards with them, and smiled at a buxom peasant-girl of attractive plumpness. He shivered as he glanced at one of Mieris's snow-storms

or fought fiercely as he stood before a battle-scene by Salvator Rosa. He patted the tomahawk of a Mohawk and felt the scalping-knife of a Cherokee who was removing the skin from his skull. Marvelling at the sight of a rebec, he placed it in the hands of a fair châtelaine, drinking in its delicious melody, and declaring his love, at evening, beside a Gothic fireplace, in the half-darkness, where her glance of consent was lost to sight. He clung to every joy, grasped at every grief, took unto himself all the formulas of existence, dispensing his life and his feelings so generously over the simulacra of that plastic and void nature, that the sound of his footsteps resounded in his soul like the distant murmuring of another world, as the hum of Paris rises to the summit of the towers of Notre-Dame.

As he ascended the inner staircase which led to the rooms on the first-floor, he saw votive bucklers, stands of arms, carved shrines, wooden figures, hanging on the wall and standing on every stair. Pursued by the strangest forms, by marvellous creations perched on the boundary line between life and death, he walked on amid the enchantments of a dream. At last, doubting the reality of his own existence, he came to be like the curious objects about him, neither altogether dead nor altogether alive. When he entered the next series of warerooms, the daylight was beginning to fade; but light seemed unnecessary to the treasures, resplendent with gold and silver, that were heaped up there. The most extravagant caprices of spendthrifts who

had died in garrets after possessing many millions were to be found in that vast bazaar of human follies. A desk that had been sold for a hundred thousand francs and bought back again for five stood near a secret lock, whose original price would have sufficed for a king's ransom. There the human race appeared in all the pomp of its misery, in all the splendor of its colossal pettiness. An ebony table that an artist would have idolized, carved after designs by Jean Goujon, and representing several years of hard work, had been secured, in all probability, for its value as kindling-wood. Priceless caskets, furniture made by fairy hands, were heedlessly piled together.

"You have millions of francs here!" cried the young man, as they reached the end of a long procession of apartments, gilded and carved by artists of the last century.

"Say thousands of millions," replied the fat, chubby-faced youth. "But this is nothing, go on up to the third floor, and you'll see!"

The unknown followed his guide and entered a fourth gallery, where there passed one after another before his tired eyes several pictures by Poussin, a sublime statue by Michael Angelo, some fascinating landscapes by Claude Lorrain, a Gerard Douw that resembled a page from Sterne, works of Rembrandt, Murillo, Velasquez, sombre and dark-hued like a poem of Lord Byron; antique bas-reliefs, too, and agate cups and bits of onyx of marvellous beauty! In a word, there was handiwork so exquisite as to disgust

one with all work, *chefs-d'œuvre* in such numbers as to make one detest art and to kill enthusiasm. He passed one of Raphael's Virgins, but he was tired of Raphael. A Correggio that well deserved a glance did not obtain it. An antique porphyry vase, of inestimable value, with circular carvings representing the most fantastically licentious of all obscene Roman pictures, the treasure of some Corinne, hardly provoked a smile. He was suffocating under the ruins of fifty vanished centuries, he was ill with all the human thoughts that filled his mind, worn out by luxury and art, oppressed by those regenerated shapes which, like monsters sown beneath his feet by some evil spirit, waged endless war upon him.

Does not the soul, resembling in its fancies modern chemistry, which represents creation as a gas—does not the soul compound deadly poisons by the swift concentration of its enjoyments, its forces, or its ideas? Do not many men perish under the murderous force of some moral acid suddenly spread broadcast through their inner being?

"What does this box contain?" he asked, when they came to a large cabinet, a last storehouse of glory, of human efforts, of strange conceptions, of priceless treasures; and he pointed to a large square mahogany box hanging from a nail by a silver chain.

"Oh! monsieur has the key to it," said the stout youth, with a mysterious air. "If you want to see the portrait, I will take the risk of telling him."

"Risk!" said the young man. "Is your master a prince?"

"I don't know," replied the youth. They looked at each other for a moment, each as surprised as the other. Interpreting the stranger's silence as a wish, the apprentice left him alone in the cabinet.

Did you ever plunge into the boundless expanse of space and time while reading Cuvier's geological works? Carried away by his genius, have you soared above the bottomless abyss of the past, as if upheld by the hand of an enchanter? As you trace, from cutting to cutting, from layer to layer, beneath the quarries of Montmartre or among the slate deposits of the Ural, the discoveries of animals whose fossilized remains belong to antediluvian civilizations, the soul is aghast at the glimpse of the thousands of millions of years, of the millions of people, whom feeble human memory, whom indestructible divine tradition, have forgotten, and whose ashes, heaped upon the surface of our globe, form the two feet of earth which yield us bread and flowers. Is not Cuvier the greatest poet of our age? Lord Byron has, it is true, reproduced in words some forms of moral agitation; but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed worlds with bleached bones, has, like Cadmus, rebuilt cities with teeth, has repeopled a thousand forests with all the wonders of zoölogy by means of a few fragments of coal, has discovered a nation of giants in the foot of a mammoth. Those figures stand erect, tower in the air, and people regions in harmony with their colossal stature. He is a poet with numbers, he is sublime as he places a cipher beside a seven. He reawakens life in the

void without pronouncing artificial mystic words; he scrapes a fragment of gypsum, discovers a footprint on it, and exclaims: "See this!" Suddenly the blocks of marble turn to animals, death becomes life, the past is unrolled! After innumerable dynasties of gigantic creatures, after races of fishes and clans of mollusks, the human race appears at last, the degenerate product of a grandiose type, degraded perhaps by the Creator. Warmed to life by his retrospective glance, these puny men, born yesterday, are able to overleap chaos, to sing an endless hymn of praise, and to evoke the past of the universe in a sort of retrogressive Apocalypse. In presence of that terrifying resurrection due to the voice of a single man, the crumb whose usufruct is granted to each of us in that nameless infinity, common to all spheres and known to us by the name of TIME,—that infinitesimal crumb of life is pitiable. We wonder, crushed as we are under such a multitude of worlds in ruins, of what use are our glories, our hatreds, our loves; and if we ought to accept the burden of life in order to become an intangible speck in the future? Uprooted from the present, we are dead until our valet enters and says to us: "Madame la comtesse replied that she expected monsieur."

The wondrous objects which thus spread before the young man's eyes the whole of known creation caused in his mind the painful depression produced in the mind of the philosopher by the scientific aspect of unknown creations; he longed for death more eagerly than ever, and he sank upon a curule chair

letting his glance wander over the fantastic details of that panorama of the past. The pictures lighted up, the Virgins' faces smiled upon him, and the statues assumed the coloring of fictitious life. Under cover of the darkness, and set in motion by the feverish excitement that fermented in his bewildered brain, the works of art danced and whirled about before him; each hideous creature bestowed its grimace upon him, the eyelids of the persons represented in the pictures descended over their eyes to give them rest. Each strange shape quivered and leaped, stepped from its place, solemnly, friskily, with graceful or abrupt movements, according to its habits, its character, its texture. It was a mystic witches' Sabbath, worthy to be compared to the fantastic performances witnessed by Doctor Faust on the Brocken. But these optical phenomena, induced by fatigue, by the strain upon the optic nerves, or by the vagaries of the twilight, were powerless to terrify the stranger. The terrors of life had no effect upon a mind familiarized with the terrors of death. Indeed, he encouraged by a sort of mocking complicity the peculiar manifestations of that moral galvanism whose prodigies chimed in with the last thoughts which still kept alive the consciousness of existence. The silence that enveloped him was so profound that he soon fell into a gentle reverie, whose impressions, growing slowly darker, followed from shadow to shadow, and as if by magic, the gradual declining of the light of day. One last gleam from the sky caused a last reddish reflection to make a stand

against the deepening darkness; he raised his head and noticed a skeleton in the dim light, whose skull moved doubtfully from right to left, as if to say to him: "The dead do not want you yet!" As he passed his hand across his forehead to drive away the tendency to drowsiness, the young man was distinctly conscious of a cool wind caused by some hairy substance brushing against his cheeks, and he shivered. As he heard a dull thud against the window, he concluded that that cold caress, worthy of the mysterious occupants of the tomb, was bestowed by some bat. For another moment the vague reflection of the setting sun allowed him to see indistinctly the phantoms by which he was surrounded; then all that dead nature was shrouded in uniform darkness. Night, the time to die, had suddenly arrived. After that, for a certain time he had no clear perception of earthly things, either because he was engrossed by profound meditation or because he had yielded to the drowsiness caused by his weariness and by the multitude of thoughts that tore his heart. Suddenly he fancied that his name had been called by an awe-inspiring voice, and he started, as when in the midst of a horrible nightmare one is hurled at one bound into the depths of an abyss. He closed his eyes, for the rays of a bright light dazzled him: he saw in the dense darkness the gleam of a reddish sphere in the centre of which stood a little old man, holding a lamp so that the light fell upon him. He had not heard him enter the room, or speak, or move. There was a suggestion of magic in his sudden

appearance. The bravest man, awakened thus suddenly from his sleep, would doubtless have trembled at the sight of that individual, who seemed to have stepped from a sarcophagus near by. The strange youthful fire that enlivened the motionless eyes of that species of phantom prevented the young man from attributing the apparition to supernatural causes; nevertheless, during the brief interval that separated his somnambulistic life from his real life, he remained in the state of philosophic doubt which Descartes recommends, and was, in spite of himself, dominated by the inexplicable hallucinations whose mysteries are condemned by our pride and which our impotent learning seeks in vain to analyze.

Imagine a little, thin, wizened old man, clad in a black velvet gown, with a large silken cord around his loins. On his head was a velvet skull-cap, also black, which allowed long locks of white hair to fall on each side of his face, and yet was fitted to the head so as to form a close frame for the forehead. The gown enveloped the body as in a huge winding-sheet, and allowed no part of the human form to be seen save a pale, narrow face. Except for the skinny arm, which resembled a stick swathed in velvet, and which the old man held aloft in order to throw the full light of the lamp on the stranger, that face would have seemed to be hanging in the air. A gray, pointed beard concealed the strange being's chin and made him resemble the Jewish faces that artists take for their types when they wish to represent Moses. The man's lips were so colorless and

thin that one needed to pay the closest attention in order to detect the line traced by his mouth in his white face. His broad, wrinkled forehead, his sunken, sallow cheeks, the pitiless sternness of his little green eyes devoid of lashes or eyebrows, were well calculated to make the stranger believe that Gerard Douw's *Money-Changer* had stepped out of his frame. The cunning of an inquisitor, betrayed by the crooked lines of the wrinkles and the circular folds about the temples, denoted profound knowledge of the things of this life. It was impossible to deceive that man, who seemed to have the gift of divining thoughts in the depths of the most secretive hearts. The morals of all nations on the globe and their wisdom were summed up on his impassive face, even as the products of the whole world were accumulated in his dusty warerooms. You could read thereon the clear-sighted tranquillity of a God who sees all things, or the conscious strength of a man who has seen all things. A painter in two strokes of his brush, by giving two different expressions to that face, could have made of it a beautiful image of the Everlasting Father or the sneering mask of Mephistopheles, for there was a combination of supreme power on the forehead and sinister mockery about the mouth. That man must have killed all earthly joy while grinding all human suffering to powder beneath his mighty power. The moribund shuddered at the thought that the old wizard inhabited a sphere outside of the world, in which he lived alone, without joy, because he no longer had illusions, without

sorrow, because he no longer knew aught of pleasure. He stood erect, motionless, immovable as a star in the midst of a cloud of light. His green eyes, filled with an indefinable placid cunning, seemed to illumine the world of thought as his lamp illumined that mysterious cabinet.

Such was the strange spectacle that surprised the young man when he opened his eyes, after being soothed into unconsciousness by thoughts of death and fantastic images. If he was dazed for a moment, if he allowed himself for a brief space to be swayed by a superstitious thought worthy of children who listen to their nurses' tales, that error must be attributed to the veil thrown over his life and his understanding by his meditations, to the irritation of his tense nerves, to the exciting drama whose scenes had afforded him in full measure the ghastly joys contained in a pinch of opium. This vision was taking place in Paris, on Quai Voltaire, in the nineteenth century, a time and place when magic would seem to be impossible. In close proximity to the house where the god of French incredulity had breathed his last, a disciple of Gay-Lussac and Arago, and a despiser of the juggling tricks performed by those in power, the young man doubtless obeyed only those poetic fascinations to which we often yield, as if to evade despairing truths, as if to challenge the power of God. He trembled, therefore, before that light and that old man, excited by the inexplicable presentiment of some extraordinary power; but his excitement was similar to what we

have all felt before a picture of Napoléon, or in presence of some great man of brilliant genius and clothed in renown.

"Does monsieur wish to see the portrait of Jesus Christ painted by Raphael?" the old man inquired, courteously, in a voice in whose clear, sharp resonance there was a somewhat metallic ring.

He placed the lamp on the shaft of a broken column, so that the mahogany box received its full light.

At the sacred names of Christ and Raphael, the young man allowed a gesture of curiosity to escape him, which the dealer evidently anticipated, and he at once pressed a spring. The mahogany panel slid along a groove, fell noiselessly, and exposed the canvas to the young man's wondering eyes. At sight of that immortal creation, he forgot the strange contents of the warerooms, the fantasies of his dreams; he became a man once more, recognized in the old man a creature of flesh and blood, intensely alive, in no sense phantasmagorial, and he lived once more in the real world. The loving solicitude, the mild serenity of the divine features exerted an instant influence upon him. Some perfume dispensed from Heaven put to flight the infernal agony that burned the very marrow of his bones. The face of the Saviour of mankind seemed to stand out from the darkness indicated by a black background; a halo of golden beams shone bright around his hair from which their light seemed to issue; beneath the brow, beneath the flesh, there was an eloquent meaning which escaped in penetrating waves through every

feature. The ruddy lips had just uttered the word of life, and the spectator listened for the sacred echo in the air, he entreated the silence to repeat its fascinating parables, he listened to it in the future and found it in the teachings of the past. The Gospel was translated by the tranquil simplicity of those lovely eyes in which troubled souls found refuge. And lastly, the whole Catholic religion could be read in a sweet, transcendent smile which seemed to give utterance to the precept in which that faith is summarized: *Love one another!* The painting inspired prayer, urged forgiveness, stifled selfishness, awakened all the sleeping virtues. Sharing the privilege of divine music, Raphael's work subjected you to the imperious spell of memory, and its triumph was complete—you forgot the painter. The light also had a wonderful effect upon that marvellous production: at times it seemed as if the head were moving in the distance, in the bosom of a cloud.

"I have covered that canvas with gold pieces," said the dealer, coldly.

"Ah, well, it must be death!" cried the young man, emerging from a reverie, whose last thought had led him back to his destiny by forcing him to abandon gradually a last hope to which he had clung.

"Aha! so I was right to distrust you!" replied the old man, grasping the other's hands by the wrists and holding them in his fingers as in a vise.

The stranger smiled sadly at that misconception, and said, gently:

"Oh! monsieur, have no fear, my own life is concerned, not yours. Why should I not confess an innocent fraud?" he continued, after a glance at the perturbed old man. "While waiting for the darkness, so that I might drown myself without attracting attention, I came to see your treasures. Who would not forgive a man of some learning and of poetic mind, for indulging in that last pleasure?"

The suspicious dealer scrutinized, with a cunning eye, the gloomy countenance of his pretended customer, as he listened to his words. Speedily reassured by the tone of that sorrowful voice, or reading, perhaps, on those colorless features the sinister destiny which had lately made the gamblers shudder, he released his hands; but, with a remnant of suspicion, denoting an experience of at least a century, he carelessly put out his hand toward a sideboard as if to lean upon it, and said, as he picked up a stiletto:

"Have you been three years a supernumerary at the Treasury without receiving any perquisites?"

The unknown could not restrain a smile as he shook his head.

"Perhaps your father reproved you too sharply for coming into the world? or you are in disgrace?"

"If I wanted to disgrace myself, I would live."

"Have you been hissed at the Funambules? or are you compelled to write farces to pay for your mistress's funeral? Perhaps you have the gold sickness? Are you trying to avoid *ennui?* In a word, what mistake have you made that impels you to die?"

"Do not seek the motive of my death in the commonplace reasons which account for the majority of suicides. To spare myself the trouble of describing incredible sufferings—such sufferings as it is difficult to describe in any human tongue—I will tell you that I am in the deepest, the basest, the most acute of all forms of poverty. And," he added, in a tone whose savage pride gave the lie to his preceding words, "I do not choose to beg either for help or comfort."

"Eh! eh!"

These two syllables, which were the only reply the old man made at first, resembled the noise of a rattle. Then he continued:

"Without compelling you to ask help from me, without causing you to blush, and without giving you a French centime, a Levantine para, a Sicilian tarant, a German pfennig, a Russian kopek, a Scotch farthing, a single sesterce or obolus of the old world, nor a piastre of the new, without offering you anything in the way of gold, silver, base metal, paper, or notes, I propose to make you richer, more powerful, and more highly considered than a constitutional king can ever hope to be."

The young man thought that the old fellow must be in his dotage, and he sat in apparent bewilderment, not venturing to speak.

"Turn about," said the dealer, suddenly taking up the lamp and turning it in such a way as to cast its light upon the wall opposite the portrait, "and look at yonder SHAGREEN SKIN."

The young man rose suddenly and manifested

some surprise when he saw hanging to the wall above the chair on which he had been sitting, a piece of *shagreen*, no larger than a fox's skin; but, by a phenomenon inexplicable at first glance, the skin projected such vivid rays of light into the darkness that reigned in the shop, that you would have said it was a small comet. The young sceptic walked up to the alleged talisman which had the power to preserve him from misfortune, and scoffed at it in his own mind. Impelled, however, by a very natural curiosity, he leaned forward to look at the skin on all sides, and soon discovered a natural explanation of its strange brilliancy. The black grains of the shagreen were so carefully polished and so highly burnished, its irregular stripes were so clean and clearly marked, that, like the facets of a garnet, the excrescences of that oriental leather formed many small surfaces which vividly reflected the light. He mathematically proved to the old man the source of the phenomenon, but his only reply was a cunning smile. That smile of superiority led the young student to believe that some trick was being played upon him. He did not choose to carry another enigma with him to the tomb, and turned the skin hastily, like a child eager to learn the secrets of his new toy.

"Aha!" he cried, "here is the impression of the seal that the orientals call Solomon's Seal."

"So you know it, do you?" inquired the dealer, emitting from his nostrils two or three puffs of air that expressed more ideas than the most energetic language would have done.

"Is there a man in the world foolish enough to believe in that nonsense?" cried the young man, stung by that silent laughter, overflowing with bitter mockery. "Do you not know," he added, "that the superstitions of the Orient have consecrated the mystic shape and deceptive characters of that token, which represents a fabulous power? I do not think that I am more open to the charge of folly in this matter than if I were to speak of sphinxes or griffins, whose existence is admitted mythologically, so to speak."

"As you are an Orientalist," said the old man, "perhaps you can read that sentence?"

He put the lamp close to the talisman, which the young man was holding with its face to the wall, and called his attention to certain characters embedded in the cellular tissue of the wonderful skin, as if they had been produced by the animal to which it had once belonged.

"I confess," cried the unknown, "that I cannot imagine the process by which those letters were cut so deep in a wild ass's skin."

He turned hastily toward the tables laden with curiosities, and his eyes seemed to be looking for something there.

"What do you want?" the old man asked.

"Something to cut the skin, so that I can see whether the letters are stamped on the leather, or inlaid."

The old man handed him his stiletto; the stranger took it and tried to cut the skin at the place where

the words were written; but when he had raised a thin layer of leather, the letters reappeared, so distinct and so identical in shape with those on the surface, that he thought, for a moment, that he had taken nothing away.

"The artisans of the Levant have secrets which are really secrets," he said, scrutinizing the oriental characters with some uneasiness.

"Yes," replied the old man, "it is better to attribute it to man than to God!"

The mysterious words were arranged in the following manner:

لو ملكتنى ملكت آلكلّ
ولكن عمرك ملكى
واراد الله هكذا
اطلب وستنال مطالبك
ولكن قسن مطالبك على عمرك
وهى هاهنا
فبكل مرامك استسنزل ايامك
أتريد ئ
اللّه يجيبك
آمين

Which may be translated:

IF THOU POSSESSEST ME, THOU WILT POSSESS ALL.
BUT THY LIFE WILL BELONG TO ME. GOD SO
WILLS IT. WISH, AND THY WISHES SHALL BE
FULFILLED. BUT MEASURE THY WISHES BY
THY LIFE. IT IS CONTAINED HEREIN.
AT EVERY WISH, I SHALL DECREASE
IN SIZE, LIKE THY DAYS. WILT
THOU HAVE ME? TAKE ME.
GOD WILL GRANT THY
WISHES. SO BE IT!

"Ah! you read Sanscrit readily," said the old man. "Perhaps you have travelled in Persia or Bengal?"

"No, monsieur," replied the stranger, running his hand curiously over the symbolic skin, which resembled a sheet of metal in its rigidity.

The old dealer replaced the lamp on the column from which he had taken it, bestowing upon the young man a coldly ironical glance that seemed to say: "He has already ceased to think about dying."

"Is this a jest, is it a mystery?" queried the unknown.

The old man shook his head, and said in a grave tone:

"I should not know how to answer. I have offered the terrible power that this talisman confers, to men endowed with greater energy than you seem

to have; but while scoffing at the problematical influence it might have upon their future destinies, not one of them chose to risk entering into the fatal compact proposed by some mysterious power—of what nature I do not know. I do as they have done; I have my doubts, I have let it alone, and—"

"And you haven't even tried it?" the young man interrupted.

"Tried it!" rejoined the old man. "If you were on top of the column on Place Vendôme, would you try jumping off? Can you check the course of life? Has man ever succeeded in cutting death in two? Before you entered this cabinet, you had determined to take your own life; but suddenly a secret fills your mind and turns it from the thought of death. Child! Will not every day of your life afford a more interesting riddle than this? Listen to me. I saw the Regent's licentious court. I was then poor, as you are now, I begged my bread; nevertheless I have reached the age of one hundred and two years and I have become a millionaire: misfortune brought me wealth, ignorance taught me. I propose to reveal to you in a few words a great mystery of human life. Man wears himself out by two acts instinctively performed, which exhaust the sources of his life. Two verbs express all the forms assumed by these two causes of death: to WILL and to BE ABLE. Between these two limits of human action, there is another formula, which wise men act upon, and to it I owe my good fortune and my longevity. WILL scorches us, POWER consumes us; but KNOWLEDGE leaves our

feeble organism in a state of perpetual tranquillity. Thus desire, or will, is dead within me, killed by thought; movement, or power, is dissolved by the natural play of my organs. In two words, I have established the seat of my life, not in the heart, for it may break, not in the senses, which grow dull, but in the brain, which does not wear out, but survives all the rest. Neither my mind nor my body is injured by excess in any direction. And yet I have seen the whole world. My feet have trodden the highest mountains of Asia and America, I have learned all human tongues, and I have lived under all forms of government. I have lent money to a Chinaman, taking his father's body as security; I have slept under the tent of the Arab, trusting his word; I have signed contracts in all the capitals of Europe, and I have left my gold fearlessly in the wigwam of the savage; in fact, I have obtained everything, because I have been strong enough to despise everything. My sole ambition has been to see. To see—is it not to know? And to know—ah! young man, is not that to enjoy by intuition? is it not to detect the very substance of the thing and to seize its very essence? What remains after material possession? an idea. Judge, therefore, how happy that man's life must be, who, having the power to stamp all the realities upon his mind, transports thither all the sources of happiness and extracts from them innumerable ideal pleasures stripped of all earthly dross. Thought is the key to all treasures, it affords one the joys of the miser without his anxieties.

Thus have I soared above the world, where all my pleasures have been intellectual enjoyments. My dissipation has consisted of contemplation of seas, peoples, forests, and mountains! I have seen everything, but quietly and without weariness; I have never longed for anything, I have waited for everything to come to me. I have walked about in the world as in the garden of an estate that belonged to me. What men call disappointment, love, ambition, reverses, sadness, are to me simply ideas which I transform into reveries; instead of feeling them, I express them, I translate them; instead of allowing them to consume my life, I dramatize and develop them; I entertain myself with them as if they were novels which I read with an inward sight. Having never wearied my organs, I still enjoy robust health. As my mind inherited all the strength I did not abuse, this head is still better furnished than my warerooms. Here," he added, striking his forehead, "are the real millions. I pass delightful days casting an intelligent glance upon the past; I evoke whole countries, sites of cities, views of the ocean, faces of historical beauty! I have an imaginary harem, where I possess all the women I have never possessed. I often review your wars, your revolutions, and pass judgment upon them. Oh! how can one prefer a feverish, fickle admiration for a bit of flesh more or less brilliantly colored, for a more or less shapely form; how can one prefer all the catastrophes that befall your misguided wills, to the sublime faculty of causing the whole universe to appear to one's mind, to

the boundless pleasure of moving about unfettered by the bonds of time or space, to the pleasure of understanding everything, of seeing everything, of leaning over the edge of the world to question other spheres and to listen to the voice of God? This," he said, in a voice of startling earnestness, pointing to the shagreen skin, "is *power* and *will* combined. In it are embodied your social ideas, your unreasoning desires, your excesses, your joys that kill, your sorrows that make life too intense; for pain, after all, is only intense pleasure. Who can say at what point pleasure becomes pain, at what point pain is still pleasure? Do not the most vivid lights of the world of the imagination soothe the eyes, whereas the softest shadows of the physical world always wound them? Is not the word wisdom—*sagesse*—derived from the same root as knowledge—*savoir*—? and what is madness, if not the excess of will or power?"

"True, true, but I choose to live immoderately!" exclaimed the young man, seizing the shagreen skin.

"Beware, young man!" cried the dealer, with incredible energy.

"I had decided my life by study and thought, and they have not even nourished me," retorted the unknown. "I do not choose to be the dupe either of a sermon worthy of Swedenborg, or of your oriental amulet, or of your charitable efforts, monsieur, to detain me in a world where life henceforth is impossible to me.—Let us see!" he added, grasping the talisman convulsively and looking at the old man. "I want

a superb dinner fit for a king, a feast worthy of the age in which everything, they say, has been brought to perfection! I wish my guests to be young, clever, and free from prejudices, jovial to the point of folly! Let the wines be each more potent and more sparkling than the last, and strong enough to make us drunk for three days! Let passionate women bear us company to-night! I desire that delirious, uproarious revelry shall bear us, in its chariot drawn by four horses, far beyond the limits of the world, to land us upon unknown shores! Let our souls ascend to heaven or plunge into the mud, I know not whether they will then rise or fall, nor do I care! Thus I command this ominous power to melt all joys into one joy for me. Yes, I feel that I must enfold the pleasures of heaven and earth in one last embrace, that I may die of them. And after drinking, let us have obscene verses as in ancient times, and songs to wake the dead, and triple kisses, kisses without end, whose uproar shall pass over Paris like the crackling of a conflagration, waking husbands and wives and kindling an ardent flame that will rejuvenate them all, even the septuagenarians!"

A burst of laughter from the little old man's mouth echoed in the young madman's ears like a roar from hell, and imposed silence on him so imperatively that he held his peace.

"Do you imagine," said the dealer, "that my floors are going to open all at once and give passage to tables sumptuously served, and guests from the other world? No, no, my young giddypate! You

have signed the compact and that ends it. Now your wishes will be scrupulously fulfilled, but at the expense of your life. The circle of your days, represented by this skin, will contract according to the importance and number of your wishes, from the most trivial to the most extravagant. The Brahmin to whom I am indebted for this talisman informed me long ago that it would effect a mysterious harmony between the possessor's destiny and his wishes. Your first wish is commonplace; I could gratify it, but I leave it to the circumstances of your new existence. After all, you intended to die, did you not? well, your suicide is simply postponed."

The stranger, surprised and almost annoyed to be constantly made sport of by the extraordinary old man, whose half-philanthropic purpose seemed to him clearly established by that last mocking sentence, cried out:

"I will see, monsieur, if my fortune will change during the time it takes me to cross the quay. But if you are not simply making sport of an unfortunate devil, I wish, in order to be revenged on you for such a fatal service, that you may fall in love with a ballet-dancer! Then you will appreciate the pleasures of a debauch, and perhaps you will become open-handed with all the wealth you have so philosophically hoarded."

*

He left the cabinet, not hearing the heavy sigh that the old man uttered, passed through the warerooms and down the stairs, followed by the chubby-faced youth, who tried in vain to light him; he ran with the speed of a thief caught in the act. Blinded by a sort of frenzy, he did not even notice the extraordinary flexibility of the shagreen skin, which had become as supple as a glove, and which he rolled between his feverish fingers and placed in his pocket almost by instinct. As he darted through the shop-door to the sidewalk, he collided with three young men who were walking along arm-in-arm.

"Beast!"

"Idiot!"

Such were the courteous epithets they exchanged.

"Why, it's Raphael!"

"Well, well, we were looking for you!"

"What! is it you?"

These three amicable sentences succeeded the insulting epithets as soon as the light of a street lantern swaying in the wind fell upon the faces of the astonished group.

"My dear fellow," said the young man whom Raphael had nearly overturned, "you must come with us."

"Why, what's in the wind?"

"Come on, and I'll tell you about it as we go along."

Raphael's friends surrounded him, and, having added him to their jovial band by passing their arms through his, led him away, whether he would or not, in the direction of Pont des Arts.

"My dear fellow," continued the spokesman, "we have been on your track for about a week. At your respectable Hôtel de Saint-Quentin,—whose imperishable sign, by the way, still bears the name in alternate black and red letters, as in the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau,—your Léonarde informed us that you had gone into the country. And yet we certainly hadn't the look of duns, bailiffs, creditors, sheriff's officers, etc. Never mind! Rastignac saw you the night before at the Bouffons, so we took courage and staked our self-esteem upon discovering whether you were perched on the trees on the Champs-Elysées, whether you had gone to pass the night for two sous in one of the philanthropic establishments where beggars sleep on tight-ropes; or whether you had had better fortune and had pitched your tent in some boudoir. We could find you nowhere, not on the prisoners' register at Sainte-Pélagie, nor at La Force! The departments, the Opéra, the convents, cafés, libraries, prefects' lists, newspaper offices, restaurants, theatre lobbies—in short, all the resorts of Paris, good and bad, having been thoroughly explored, we were bewailing the loss of a man endowed with sufficient genius to lead his friends to look for him at court and in the prisons

with equal reason. We were talking of canonizing you as a hero of July! and, on my word, we regretted you!"

At that moment, Raphael and his friends were crossing Pont des Arts, and he, not listening to them, looked down at the Seine, whose murmuring waters reflected the lights of Paris. Above that river, into which he had so recently proposed to plunge, the old man's predictions were fulfilled, the hour of his death was already postponed as by the interposition of fate.

"Yes, we really regretted you," continued his friend, still pursuing the same theme. "There is a scheme on foot in which we included you as a man of superior parts, that is, a man who is capable of placing himself above everything. The manipulation of the constitutional juggling-balls under the royal goblet is going on to-day more shamelessly than ever, my dear fellow. The detestable monarchy overthrown by popular heroism was a woman of ill-fame with whom one could laugh and carouse; but one's native land is a shrewish, virtuous spouse; we must accept her methodical caresses, whether we like them or not. Now, then, as you know, the seat of power is transferred from the Tuileries to the newspaper offices, and the budget in like manner has changed its quarters from Faubourg Saint-Germain to the Chaussée d'Antin. But here is something that, perhaps, you don't know. The government, that is to say, the aristocracy of bankers and lawyers who compose the nation to-day, just as the priests

used to make the monarchy, has felt the need of hoodwinking the good people of France with old ideas clothed in new words, in emulation of philosophers of all schools and great men of all times. Their present object is to inculcate in us royal-national opinions by proving to us that it is much better to pay twelve hundred millions and thirty-three centimes to the country, represented by Messieurs So-and-So, than eleven hundred millions and nine centimes to a king who said *I* instead of *we*. In a word, a newspaper, backed by two or three hundred thousand good francs, has just been founded with the aim of forming an opposition that will content the malcontents without undermining the citizen-king's national government. Now, as we scoff at liberty no less than at despotism, at religion as well as unbelief; as, in our eyes, the country is a capital where ideas are exchanged and sold at so much a line, where every day brings its toothsome dinner and numerous plays, where wanton prostitutes abound, where suppers last until the morning, where love is hired by the hour like cabs; as Paris will always be the most adorable of all countries, the country of joy, of liberty, of wit, of pretty women, of knaves, and of good wine, where the club of the powers that be will never be felt too heavily because one is close to those who wield it;—so we, genuine disciples of the god Mephistopheles, have undertaken to paint public-spirit a different color, to recostume the actors, to nail fresh boards to the governmental shanty, to physic the doctrinaires,

warm over the old republicans, whitewash the Bonapartists, and revictual the Centre, provided that we are permitted to laugh in our sleeves at kings and peoples, to change our opinions between morning and night, and to lead joyous lives *à la Panurge*, or *more orientali*, reclining on soft cushions. We intended that you should hold the reins of this burlesque macaronic empire; so we are escorting you at the present moment to the dinner given by the founder of said journal, a retired banker, who, not knowing what to do with his gold, is seeking to change it into wit. You will be welcomed like a brother there, we will salute you as king of those critical spirits whom nothing daunts, whose perspicacity detects the schemes of Austria, England, or Russia before Russia, England, or Austria have schemes! Yes, we will enthrone you as sovereign of those intellectual forces which supply the world with Mirabeaus, Talleyrands, Pitts, Metternichs, all the clever Crispins, in fact, who play for the destinies of an empire as vulgar mortals play dominoes for *kirschenwasser*. We have held you up as the most gallant boon-companion that ever fought hand to hand with debauchery, that admirable monster with whom all strong minds long to try a fall; we have gone so far as to assert that it has never vanquished you as yet. I trust that you will not give the lie to our laudation. Taillefer, our host, has promised to surpass the half-hearted saturnalia of our petty modern Luculluses. He is rich enough to display grandeur in small matters, and grace and refinement

in vice.—Do you understand, Raphael?" inquired the speaker, interrupting himself.

"Yes," the young man replied, less surprised at the fulfilment of his wishes than at the natural way in which things came about.

Although it was impossible for him to believe in the influence of magic, he marvelled at the strange hazards of human destiny.

"Why, you say yes as if you were thinking about your grandfather's death," retorted one of his friends.

"Ah!" rejoined Raphael, in an ingenuous tone that brought a smile to the lips of those youthful writers, the hope of young France, "I was thinking, my friends, that we are on the point of becoming great rascals! Heretofore we have mocked at religion between two glasses of wine, we have discussed life in general when we were drunk, and have passed judgment on men and things while our dinner was digesting. Virgins in fact, we were very audacious in speech; but now, branded by the red-hot iron of politics, we are about to enter that vast sink of iniquity and lose our illusions there. When one has ceased to believe in the devil, he may be permitted to think regretfully of the paradise of youth, of the days of innocence, when we devoutly held out our tongues to the good priest to receive the consecrated body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Ah! my dear friends, if we took so much pleasure in committing our first sins, it was because remorse embellished them and gave them a piquant flavor; whereas, now—"

"Oh! now," rejoined the first speaker, "we have—"

"What?" queried another.

"Crime—"

"There's a word that is as high as the gallows and as deep as the Seine," observed Raphael.

"Oh! you don't understand me. I refer to political crimes. Since this morning, I have envied only one class of people,—conspirators. I don't know if I shall have the same whim to-morrow; but to-night, the colorless life of our civilization, smooth as the track of a railway, makes my heart leap with disgust. I am passionately enamored of the disasters of the retreat from Moscow, of the emotions of the *Red Corsair*, and the adventurous life of a smuggler. As there are no longer Carthusian convents in France, I would like at least a Botany Bay, a sort of infirmary for the accommodation of little Lord Byrons, who, after crumpling up life as they do a napkin after dinner, have nothing better to do than to set their country on fire, blow out their brains, conspire in aid of a republic, or demand war—"

"Emile," said Raphael's neighbor, interrupting the speaker, with some heat, "on my word, if it hadn't been for the Revolution of July, I'd have turned priest and gone and led the life of an animal in the depths of some province, and—"

"And you'd have read your breviary every day."

"Yes."

"You're a fool."

"Why, we read the newspapers."

"Not bad for a newspaper man! But hold your tongue, for we are walking amid a swarm of subscribers. Journalism, you see, is the religion of modern societies, and it is a step forward."

"How so?"

"The pontiffs aren't required to believe, or the people either."

Idly chatting thus, like worthy folk who have been familiar with the *De Viris Illustribus* for many years, they arrived at a house on Rue Joubert.

Emile was a newspaper writer who had acquired more celebrity by doing nothing than others acquire by their successes. A bold critic, full of vigor and biting wit, he possessed all the good qualities which his failings implied. Frank and good-humored, he would make epigrams without number to the face of a friend whom he would defend, when absent, with courage and loyalty. He made fun of everything, even of his own future. Always without money, he continued, nevertheless, like all men of any calibre, plunged in unspeakable indolence, throwing a whole book in a single epigram in the faces of men who were incapable of putting epigrams in their books. Lavish of promises which he never fulfilled, he had made of his fortune and his renown a pillow to sleep upon, thus incurring the risk of waking up in his old age in the hospital. For the rest, faithful to his friends even to the scaffold, making a great display of cynicism, and simple-minded as a child, he worked only by fits and starts, and from necessity.

"We are going to have a famous *slice of good cheer*,

as Master Alcofribas would say," he said to Raphael, pointing to the boxes of flowers which filled the halls with verdure and sweet odors.

"I like vestibules well warmed and well supplied with handsome rugs," said Raphael. "Luxury beginning at the peristyle is very rare in France. Here, I feel as if I were born again."

"And up yonder we will drink and laugh once more, my poor Raphael.—By the way," he added, "I trust that we shall be victorious and that we shall march over all these heads."

With a mocking gesture he pointed to the assembled guests, as they entered a salon resplendent with gilding and light, where they were at once greeted by some of the most noteworthy young men of Paris. One had just given proof of hitherto unknown talent and in his first picture had rivalled the glories of the painters of the Empire. Another, only the day before, had ventured to put forth a book full of vigor, instinct with a sort of literary disdain, which broke out new paths for the modern school. Farther on, a sculptor, whose harsh features betokened forceful genius, was talking with one of those unemotional, sarcastic critics who sometimes refuse to acknowledge superiority anywhere and sometimes discover it everywhere, according as the spirit moves them. Here the cleverest of our caricaturists, with mischievous eye and sarcastic mouth, was listening for epigrams, that he might translate them with a stroke of his crayon. There the audacious young writer who was more successful than any other in distilling the

quintessence of political ideas, or condensing the wit of a prolific writer, making sport of it the while, was conversing with the poet, whose poems would crush all the works of the present day if his talent were as vigorous as his spleen. Both were trying not to tell the truth and not to lie, as they exchanged honeyed flatteries. A famous musician was consoling, in the key of B flat and in an ironical tone, a young politician who had recently fallen from the tribune without hurting himself. Young authors devoid of style were side by side with young authors devoid of ideas, writers of poetic prose beside prosy poets. Spying those incomplete creatures, a poor Saint-Simonian, innocent enough to believe in the doctrines he professed, had coupled them together as an act of charity, hoping doubtless to transform them into monks of his order. Lastly, there were two or three of the scientific men whose lot it is to furnish nitrogen to the conversation, and several writers of vaudevilles ready to contribute their ephemeral rays which, like the sparkle of the diamond, yield neither heat nor light. Some individuals addicted to paradox, laughing in their sleeves at the people who espoused their admiration or their contempt for men and things, were already practising the double-edged policy by which they conspire against all systems of government and take sides with none. The cavilling critic, who is surprised at nothing, who blows his nose in the middle of a cavatina at the Bouffons, who shouts *brava* before anybody else and contradicts those who anticipate his opinion, was present, trying to

appropriate the bright remarks of men of wit. Among these guests, five had a future before them, half a score attained some passing renown; as for the rest, they, like all mediocrities, might repeat to themselves Louis the Eighteenth's famous falsehood: *Union and oblivion.* The host had the thoughtfully jovial air of a man who is spending two thousand crowns. From time to time his eyes turned impatiently toward the door of the salon, seeking that one of the guests who was behindhand. Soon a little stout man appeared, and was greeted by a flattering murmur; it was the notary who had taken the final steps toward founding the newspaper that very morning. A valet dressed in black opened the doors of a vast dining-hall where each guest went without ceremony to find his seat around an enormous table. Before leaving the salons, Raphael cast a parting glance about him. His wish was certainly most completely fulfilled. The rooms were hung with silk and gold. Superb candelabra containing innumerable wax-candles brought out the smallest details of the gilded friezes, the delicate carving of the bronzes, and the rich colors of the furniture. The rare flowers contained in several jardinières, artistically constructed of bamboo, filled the air with sweet perfume! Everything, even to the draperies, bespoke unpretentious refinement; in a word, there was about everything an indefinable poetic charm whose prestige was calculated to act powerfully upon the imagination of a penniless man.

"A hundred thousand francs a year make a very

pretty commentary on the catechism, and assist one wonderfully to observe the moral law in his actions!" he said, with a sigh. "Yes, my virtue finds it hard to go on foot. To me, vice means an attic room, a threadbare coat, a gray hat in winter, and money owing to the concierge—Ah! I propose to live in the lap of luxury like this for a year, six months, no matter! and then to die. I shall at all events have known, drained, devoured a thousand lives!"

"Oh!" said Emile, who was listening to him, "you take a note-broker's coupé for happiness. Nonsense! you would soon get tired of wealth, when you discovered that it robbed you of all chance of being a superior mind. Between the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty did an artist ever hesitate? Isn't it true that we fellows cannot live without struggling? So prepare your stomach, behold!" he said, calling his attention with a grandiloquent gesture to the majestic, the thrice holy and comforting aspect presented by the blessed capitalist's banqueting hall. "That man," he continued, "has really taken the pains to pile up his wealth solely for our benefit. Is he anything more than a sort of sponge of the order of polypi overlooked by naturalists,—a sponge to be pressed gently before leaving it for the heirs to suck? Do you not consider the bas-reliefs on the wall in excellent taste? And the chandeliers, and the pictures—what refined magnificence! If we are to believe those who envy him and those who claim to discover the secret springs of life, that man killed, during the Revolution,

a German and divers other persons, among them his best friend, and that friend's mother, so it is said. Can you imagine crime beneath the grizzly hair of the venerable Taillefer? He has the appearance of a very amiable man. See how the silver plate gleams, can it be that each of its glittering rays is a dagger-thrust in his heart?—nonsense! one might as well believe in Mahomet. If the public is right, here are thirty men of heart and talent preparing to eat the entrails and drink the blood of a family; and we two, young men overflowing with guileless enthusiasm, should be accessory to the crime! I have an inclination to ask our capitalist whether he's a man of honor—"

"Not now," cried Raphael, "but when he's dead drunk; we shall have dined then."

The two friends laughingly took their seats. At first, with a glance swifter than words, each guest paid his tribute of admiration to the sumptuous spectacle presented by a long table, white as an expanse of freshly-fallen snow, upon which the plates were symmetrically arranged, each with its little white roll. The glasses multiplied the colors of the iris on their star-shaped surfaces. The candle-rays crossed and recrossed one another endlessly, the viands placed beneath silver domes sharpened appetites and curiosity. Words were rare. Each guest looked at his neighbor. Madeira was passed around. Then the first course appeared in all its glory,—it would have done honor to the late Cambacérès, and Brillat-Savarin would have sung its praises. Bordeaux and

Burgundy, white and red, were served in royal profusion. This first part of the feast may be compared, in every point, to the development of a classic tragedy. The second act was somewhat loquacious. Each guest had drunk a reasonable amount, changing his tipple as the fancy moved him, so that, when the débris of that magnificent course was removed, stormy discussions had begun; some pale brows flushed, several noses began to grow purple, faces lighted up, eyes sparkled. During this dawn of drunkenness, the conversation did not overstep the limits of civility; but sarcasms and *bons mots* issued by slow degrees from every mouth; then calumny softly raised its tiny serpent's head and spoke in flutelike tones; here and there some crafty wights listened closely, hoping to retain their reason. Thus the second course left the minds of the guests thoroughly heated. Everyone ate as he talked, talked as he ate, and drank, heedless of the frequency of his libations, the wines were so pure and fragrant, the example so contagious. Taillefer prided himself upon enlivening his guests, and he ordered the redoubtable wines of the Rhône to be served, the hot Tokay, and the old, heady Roussillon. Like fresh post-horses, given their heads as the mail-coach starts from a posting-station, those men, spurred on by the flames of the champagne, impatiently awaited but served in great abundance, allowed their wits to gallop at will in the empty void of arguments to which no one listens, began to tell stories of the sort that find no auditors, and

repeated a hundred times questions that received no reply. Revelry alone made its loud voice heard, its voice composed of a hundred confused outcries increasing in volume like Rossini's crescendos. Then came the insidious toasts, the boasting, the challenges. One and all refrained from boasting of their intellectual capacity in order to lay claim to the capacity of hogsheads and tuns and vats. It seemed that every man had two voices. There came a moment when the masters all talked at once and the servants smiled. But that *mêlée* of words, in which paradoxes of doubtful lucidity and truths grotesquely dressed jostled one another amid outcries, interlocutory decrees, definitive judgments, and utter nonsense, as grape, bullets, and cannon-balls fly back and forth in a battle, would doubtless have interested a philosopher by the oddity of the thoughts expressed, and surprised a politician by the whimsicality of the systems suggested. It was a book and a picture at once. Philosophies, religions, morals,—so different in different latitudes,—governments, and all the great acts of the human intellect fell before a scythe as long as Father Time's; and you might well have had difficulty in deciding whether it was wielded by Wisdom in her cups, or by Drunkenness become wise and clear-sighted. Carried away by a sort of tempest, those minds, like the ocean in a rage breaking against its cliffs, seemed to desire to shake the foundations of all the laws between which the different forms of civilization hesitate, thus unwittingly accomplishing the will of God, who leaves both good

and evil in nature, keeping to himself alone the secret of their never-ending conflict. Fierce and grotesque, the discussion was in some sort a witch's Sabbath of intellects. Between the melancholy jests uttered by children of the Revolution at the birth of a newspaper, and the remarks made by jovial topers at the birth of Gargantua, stretched the same vast abyss that lies between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The former organized destruction with a laugh, ours laughed amid the ruins.

"What is yonder young man's name?" said the notary, indicating Raphael. "I thought I heard someone call him Valentin."

"What are you talking about with your Valentin and nothing more?" cried Emile, with a laugh. "Raphael de Valentin, by your leave! Our arms are *an eagle or in a field sable, crowned argent, beaked and taloned gules*, with a noble device: NON CECIDIT ANIMUS! We are no foundling, but a descendant of the Emperor Valens, the parent stock of the Valentinois, founder of the cities of Valencia in Spain and Valence in France, and lawful heir to the Empire of the East. If we allow Mahmoud to sit on the throne in Constantinople, it is from pure good nature, and for lack of troops or cash."

Emile drew a crown in the air over Raphael's head with his fork. The notary reflected for a moment and soon returned to his drinking, with a deprecatory gesture by which he seemed to acknowledge the impossibility of adding to his clientage the cities of Valence, Valencia, Constantinople,

the Emperor Valens, Mahmoud, and the Valentinois family.

"Was not the destruction of those ant-hills known as Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, Venice, which were forever crushed beneath the feet of some passing giant, a warning given to man by some irreverent power?" said Claude Vignon, a species of slave, purchased to play the Bossuet at ten sous a line.

"Moses, Sylla, Louis XI., Richelieu, Robespierre, and Napoléon may all be one and the same man, who reappears at different epochs of civilization, like a comet in the sky!" replied a Ballanchist.

"Why fathom the designs of Providence?" observed Canalis, the maker of ballads.

"Bah! who mentions Providence?" interrupted the critic. "I know of nothing on earth more elastic."

"But, monsieur, Louis XIV. caused the death of more men in building the Maintenon aqueducts than did the Convention in establishing just imposts, in unifying the law, nationalizing France, and forcing the equal distribution of inheritances," said Massol, a young man who had turned republican for want of a syllable before his name.

"Monsieur," rejoined Moreau — de l'Oise, — a worthy landowner, "do not you, who take blood for wine, propose to leave every man's head on his shoulders this time?"

"What's the use, monsieur? Are not the principles of social order worth a few sacrifices?"

"I say, Bixiou! What's-his-name the republican

implies that yonder landed proprietor's head would be a sacrifice!" said a young man to his neighbor.

"Men and events are of no account," pursued the republican, following out his theory amid the hiccoughs; "there are only principles and ideas in politics and in philosophy."

"What a ghastly theory! Do you mean it would cost you nothing to kill your friends for an *if?*"

"Ah! monsieur, the man who suffers from remorse is the real villain, for he has some idea of virtue; whereas Peter the Great and the Duke of Alva were systems and Monbard the pirate an organization."

"But can't society dispense with your systems and your organizations?" said Canalis.

"Oh! to be sure," cried the republican.

"Bah! your stupid republic turns my stomach! we shouldn't be able to carve a capon in peace without running foul of the agrarian law."

"Your principles are excellent, my little truffled Brutus! But you remind me of my valet: the knave is so cruelly possessed by the mania for neatness, that if I allowed him to brush my clothes to suit himself, I should go naked."

"You are brutes! you propose to clean a whole nation with toothpicks," retorted the republican. "According to you, justice would be more dangerous than thieves."

"Well! well!" exclaimed Desroches the solicitor.

"How tiresome they are with their politics!" said Cardot the notary. "Finish this. There's no knowledge or virtue that is worth a drop of blood. If we

should undertake to make truth pay its debts, we might find it insolvent."

"Ah! it would probably have cost less to amuse ourselves with evil than to quarrel about good. I would give all the speeches made in the tribune in forty years, for a trout, for one of Perrault's anecdotes, or a sketch by Charlet."

"You are quite right!—Pass me the asparagus.—For, after all, liberty begets anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism leads back to liberty. Millions of human beings have perished without effecting the triumph of any of your systems. Isn't the circle a vicious one in which the moral world will always rotate? When man thinks he has perfected it, he has done nothing more than change things around."

"Oho!" cried Cursy the vaudevilliste, "in that case, messieurs, I propose a toast to Charles X., the father of liberty!"

"Why not?" said Emile. "When laws are despotic, morals are free, and *vice versa*."

"Then let's drink to the folly of the government, which gives us so much power over fools!" said the banker.

"I say, my dear fellow, Napoléon left us glory, if nothing more!" cried a naval officer, who had never left the harbor of Brest.

"Ah! glory indeed, a paltry crop. It costs dear and doesn't last. Is it anything more than the egotism of great men, as happiness is the egotism of fools?"

"Monsieur, you are very fortunate—"

"The man who invented ditches was undoubtedly a weak creature, for society benefits none but puny folk. The savage and the thinker, standing at the two extremities of the moral world, have an equal horror of property."

"Very pretty!" cried Cardot. "If there were no property, how should we have any deeds to draw?"

"These *petits pois* are strangely delicious!"

"And the curé was found dead in his bed the next day."

"Who talks of death?—Don't jest! I have an uncle."

"You would be resigned to losing him, I suppose?"

"That's not a fair question."

"Listen to me, messieurs!—THE WAY TO KILL ONE'S UNCLE. Hush!"—*Listen! listen!*—"In the first place, have a stout, hearty uncle, at least seventy years old, they're the best uncles."—Sensation.—"Induce him, on one pretext or another, to eat a pâté de foies gras."

"Pshaw! my uncle is a tall, thin man, miserly and abstemious."

"Ah! these uncles are monsters who misuse life!"

"And," continued the expert in uncles, "inform him, while he is digesting the pâté, of his banker's failure."

"Suppose that doesn't do the business?"

"Set a pretty girl on him!"

"And what if he is—?" said the other, shaking his head.

"Then he's no uncle,—the uncle is essentially rakish."

"Malibran's voice has lost two notes."

"No, monsieur."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Oh! oh! Yes and no,—isn't that the history of all religious, political, and literary dissertations? Man is a buffoon, who dances on the edge of precipices!"

"If I understand your meaning, I am a fool?"

"On the contrary, you're a fool because you don't understand me."

"Education,—what utter folly! Monsieur Heineffettermach estimates the number of printed volumes at more than a thousand millions, and a man's life isn't long enough to read a hundred and fifty thousand. Just tell me, then, what the word *education* means? To some, education consists in knowing the names of Alexander's horse, the dog Bérécillo, and the Seigneur des Accords, and not to know that of the man to whom we owe porcelain and the floating of logs. To others, to be educated is to know how to burn up a will and to live as honorable men, beloved and respected, instead of stealing a watch for the second time, with the five aggravating circumstances, and going to be hanged on Place de Grève, execrated and dishonored."

"Will Nathan remain?"

"His collaborators are all bright men."

"And Canalis?"

"He's a great man, say no more."

"You are drunk!"

"The immediate consequence of a constitution is the flattening out of intellects. Arts, sciences, monuments, all are devoured by a shocking prevalence of selfishness, our natural leprosy at the present day. Your three hundred bourgeois, sitting on their benches, will think of nothing but planting poplars. Despotism does grand things illegally, liberty doesn't even take the trouble to do petty things according to law."

"Your mutual-instruction system manufactures hundred-sou pieces of human flesh," interposed an absolutist. "Individualities disappear among a people placed upon the same level by education."

"But is it not the object of society to provide for the welfare of everyone?" asked the Saint-Simonian.

"If you had fifty thousand francs a year, you wouldn't waste many thoughts on the people. Are you inspired by a noble passion for humanity? go to Madagascar: you will find there a nice little nation, all fresh and new, to *Saint-Simonize*, to classify and put in bottles; but here, everyone naturally enters his own notch just as a peg fits into its hole. Concierges are concierges, and fools are blockheads, without requiring to be promoted by a college of Fathers. Ha! ha!"

"You're a Carlist!"

"Why not? I love despotism, it indicates a certain contempt for the human race. I have no quarrel with kings. They are so amusing! Is it nothing,

pray, to sit on a throne in a chamber, thirty million leagues from the sun?"

"But let us consider the broad view of civilization," said the scientific man, who had undertaken a disquisition concerning the commencement of societies and the primitive peoples, for the benefit of the inattentive sculptor. "When nations first existed, force was in some sort material, indivisible, brutal; then, as numbers increased, governments made their way by decomposition, more or less skilfully contrived, of the primitive power. Thus, in the earliest antiquity, theocracy was the seat of power; the priest held the sword and the censer. Later, there were two priesthoods: the pontiff and the king. To-day, our social structure, the last effort of civilization, has distributed power according to the number of combinations, and we have different forces called industry, thought, money, eloquence. The ruling powers, being no longer unified, are constantly marching on toward a social dissolution to which there is now no barrier but self-interest. Thus we do not lean upon religion nor upon material force, but upon intelligence. Is the book as powerful as the sword? is discussion as powerful as action? That is the problem."

"Intelligence has killed everything!" cried the Carlist. "Absolute liberty, I tell you, leads nations to suicide, they grow weary of their triumphs, like an English millionaire."

"Why don't you say something new? To-day you have cast ridicule on all forms of power, and

that is the same vulgar thing as denying God! You have no faith. This age is like an old sultan worn out by debauchery! And your Lord Byron, the last despairing shriek of poetry, sang of the passions of crime."

"Do you know," rejoined Bianchon, who was completely drunk, "that a dose of phosphorus more or less makes the man of genius or the villain, the brilliant man or the idiot, the virtuous man or the criminal?"

"Can you treat virtue so!" cried Cursy; "virtue, the subject of all stage-plays, the denouement of all dramas, the basis of all courts—"

"Oh! hold your tongue, you beast! Your virtue is Achilles without his heel!" said Bixiou.

"A glass of wine!"

"Do you want to bet that I won't drink a bottle of champagne at a single draught?"

"What a shaft of wit!" cried Bixiou.

"They're drunk as fiddlers," observed a young man who was gravely pouring wine into his waistcoat.

"Yes, monsieur, the present government is the art of enthroning public opinion."

"Public opinion? why it's the most degraded of all prostitutes! According to your politicians and men of pure morals, your laws must always be preferred to nature, public opinion to conscience. Pshaw! everything is true, everything is false! If society has given us the down for our pillows, surely it has offset the gift by the gout, just as it has established

procedure to temper justice, and influenza as a sequel to Cashmere shawls."

"Monster!" said Emile, cutting the misanthrope short, "how can you slander civilization in presence of such delicious wines and dishes, with your chin on the table? Put your teeth into that roebuck with the gilded hoofs and horns, but not into your mother."

"Is it my fault if Catholicism has gone so far as to put a million gods in a bag of flour, if the republic always ends in a Napoléon, if royalty stands between the assassination of Henri IV. and the sentence of Louis XVI., if liberalism means La Fayette?"

"Did you embrace it in July?"

"No."

"Then hold your tongue, sceptic."

"Sceptics are the most conscientious men."

"They have no consciences."

"What's that you say? they have at least two."

"Discount heaven! upon my word, monsieur, that's a genuine business man's idea. The ancient religions were simply a happy development of physical pleasures; but we have developed the soul and hope; that marks progress."

"Well, my good friends," said Nathan, "what can you expect of an age satiated with politics? What was the fate of the *Histoire du Roi de Bohème et de Ses Sept Châteaux*, the most charming conception—"

"That?" yelled the critic, from the other end of the table, "a string of phrases drawn at random from a hat, a book written for Charenton."

"You're a fool!"

"You're a villain!"

"Oho!"

"Aha!"

"They'll fight."

"No."

"Until to-morrow, monsieur."

"On the spot," replied Nathan.

"Good! good! you're two brave boys."

"You're another!" said the aggressor.

"They can't even stand up straight."

"Ah! I can't stand up straight, can't I?" exclaimed the bellicose Nathan, drawing himself up like a kite swaying in the wind.

He cast a dazed glance upon the table; then, as if exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his chair, dropped his head, and said no more.

"Wouldn't it be a joke," said the critic, to his neighbor, "to fight a duel about a book I have never seen, much less read?"

"Look out for your coat, Emile, your neighbor's turning white," said Bixiou.

"Kant, monsieur? One more balloon sent up to amuse boobies! Materialism and spiritualism are two pretty battledores with which charlatans in gowns keep the same shuttlecock in motion. Whether God is in everything, according to Spinoza, or everything comes from God, according to Saint Paul,—idiots! don't you make the same movement to open and close a door? Does the egg come from the pullet or the pullet from the egg?—Pass me the duck!—That's what all your science amounts to!"

"Imbecile!" cried the scholar, "the question you put is answered by a single fact."

"What is that?"

"Professorships weren't instituted for philosophy, I suppose, but philosophy for the professorships? Put on your glasses and read the budget."

"Thieves!"

"Idiots!"

"Rascals!"

"Dupes!"

"Where else than in Paris can you find such a keen and rapid exchange of thoughts?" exclaimed Bixiou, assuming a deep bass voice.

"Come, Bixiou, let's have a classic farce! Give it to 'em!"

"Do you want me to give you the nineteenth century?"

"Listen!"

"Silence!"

"Put a mute on your muzzle!"

"Will you hold your tongue, you Chinaman!"

"Give him some wine and keep him quiet, the child!"

"Now, Bixiou!"

The artist buttoned his black coat to the neck, put on his yellow gloves, and made himself up with a horrible squint to mimic the *Revue des Deux Mondes;* but the uproar drowned his voice, and it was impossible to hear a single word of his raillery. If he did not represent the century, he did at all events represent the *Revue*, for he did not understand himself.

The dessert was served as if by magic. The table was embellished by an immense epergne of gilded bronze from the workshops of Thomire. Tall figures, endowed by a famous artist with the conventional details of ideal beauty as accepted in Europe, supported and carried clusters of strawberries, pineapples, fresh dates, yellow grapes, ruddy peaches, oranges just arrived from Setubal by packet, pomegranates, fruits from China,—in a word, all the surprises of luxury, all the miracles of pastry, the most appetizing delicacies, the most delicious sweetmeats. The colors of this gastronomic panorama were heightened by the brilliancy of the china, by gleaming lines of gold, and by the sparkling facets of the glassware. Graceful as Ocean's fringe of liquid foam, the soft, green moss drooped over Poussin's landscapes, copied on the Sèvres porcelain. The domains of a German princeling would not have paid for all that garish magnificence. Silver, mother-of-pearl, gold, glass, were lavishly used anew, in different forms; but the glazed eyes and feverish loquacity of drunkenness barely allowed the guests to form a vague idea of that fairy-like scene, worthy of an oriental tale. The dessert wines contributed their fragrance and their flames,—penetrating potions, seductive vapors, which engender a sort of intellectual mirage, while their potent bonds fetter the feet and paralyze the hands. The pyramids of fruit were razed, voices grew thicker, and the tumult waxed louder. It was impossible to distinguish words, glasses were shivered, and wild shrieks of laughter exploded like

bombs. Cursy seized a horn and began to perform a flourish. It was like a signal given by the devil. The whole frenzied assemblage howled, whistled, sang, yelled, roared, groaned. You would have smiled to see those men, naturally of a jovial disposition, become as gloomy as Crébillon's denouements, or as pensive as sailors in a carriage. Secretive men told their secrets to busybodies who did not listen. Melancholy creatures smiled like dancers at the close of their pirouettes. Claude Vignon walked about on tiptoe like a bear in a cage. Intimate friends fought. The resemblances to animals, inscribed upon human faces, and so interestingly demonstrated by physiologists, manifested themselves vaguely in the gestures and postures of the body. There was a book all written for a Bichat who might have been there, cold and fasting. The master of the house, conscious that he was drunk, did not dare to rise, but he approved the extravagant antics of his guests by a fixed grin, trying to maintain a dignified, hospitable manner. His broad face, which had become red and blue, almost violet, and horrible to look upon, took part in the general tumult by jerky motions like the rolling and pitching of a brig.

"Did you murder them?" Emile asked him.

"The death-penalty is to be abolished, they say, in honor of the Revolution of July," replied Taillefer, raising his eyebrows with an expression that was both shrewd and idiotic.

"But don't you see them sometimes in your dreams?" Raphael insisted.

"There's a statute of limitations!" said the murderer, rolling in gold.

"And on his tomb," exclaimed Emile, in a sardonic tone, "the architect will carve the words: '*Ye who pass, bestow a tear upon his memory!*'—Ah!" he continued, "I would gladly bestow five francs on the mathematician who would prove the existence of hell to me by an algebraic equation."

He threw a gold piece into the air, crying:

"Heads for God!"

"Don't look!" said Raphael, seizing the coin; "who knows what it might be? chance is such a joker!"

"Alas!" replied Emile, with an air of burlesque sadness, "I don't know where to put my feet between the geometry of the unbeliever, and the Pope's *Pater Noster*. Bah! let us drink! *Trinc*, I believe, is the oracle of the goddess Bottle, and serves as a conclusion to Pantagruel."

"To the *Pater Noster*," rejoined Raphael, "we owe our arts, our monuments, our sciences perhaps, and—a far greater benefaction!—our modern governments, wherein a vast and fruitful society is fearfully and wonderfully represented by five hundred intellects, where the opposing forces neutralize each other, leaving full power to CIVILIZATION, the gigantic queen who replaces the KING, that awe-inspiring figure of the olden time, a sort of false destiny created by man between himself and Heaven. In presence of so many achievements, atheism seems like a skeleton which does not beget offspring. What say you?"

"I think of the rivers of blood shed by Catholicism," replied Emile, coldly. "It has resorted to our veins and our hearts to counterfeit the deluge. But never mind! Every thinking man must march under Christ's banner. He alone has consecrated the triumph of mind over matter, He alone has revealed to us poetically the intermediate world that separates us from God."

"Do you think so?" rejoined Raphael, with an indescribable drunken smile. "Well, to avoid compromising ourselves, let us drink the famous toast: *To the unknown God!*"

And they emptied their goblets of learning, of carbonic acid gas, of perfumes, poesy, and scepticism.

*

"If the gentlemen will pass into the salon, coffee will be served there," said the maître d'hôtel.

At that moment, almost all the guests were rolling in the depths of that delicious limbo where the lights of the mind are extinguished, where the body, delivered from its tyrant, abandons itself to the delirious joys of liberty. Some, who had reached the apogee of drunkenness, remained downcast, engrossed by painful efforts to grasp a thought which would attest their own existence; others, overcome by the atrophy produced by sluggish digestion, refused to move. Some dauntless orators were still declaiming vague words whose meaning eluded themselves. Now and then a refrain was heard, like the rumble of a machine compelled to live out its artificial, soulless life. Silence and uproar were strangely linked together. Nevertheless, when they heard the sonorous voice of the servant who, in his master's stead, invited them to fresh delights, the guests rose, supported or carried or dragged by one another.

The whole assemblage stood for a moment, motionless and fascinated, in the doorway. The excessive enjoyment of the banquet paled before the seductive spectacle with which their host appealed to the most voluptuous of their senses. Beneath the gleaming candles in a golden chandelier, around a table laden

with silver plate, a group of women suddenly appeared before the bewildered guests, whose eyes lighted up like so many diamonds. Rich were their costumes, but even richer the dazzling charms, in face of which all the marvels of that enchanted palace were lost to sight. The ardent eyes of the young women, bewitching as fairies, possessed even more vivacity than the torrents of light that gave lustre to the satiny sheen of the hangings, to the pure white of the marble figures, and the delicate projections of the bronzes. The heart blazed at sight of the contrasts presented by their waving head-dresses and their attitudes, each distinct from the others in character and fascination. It was a perfect hedge of flowers mingled with rubies, sapphires, and coral; a girdle of black necklaces upon snow-white necks, of light scarfs floating like the flames of a beacon, of haughty turbans, of modestly provoking tunics. That seraglio presented fascinations for every eye, gratification for every caprice. Here a danseuse, in a ravishing pose, stood as if unveiled beneath waving folds of cashmere. There a robe of transparent gauze, here a changing silk, concealed or disclosed mysterious attractions. Little, narrow feet spoke of love; fresh, rosy lips held their peace. Slender girls of decent appearance, pretended virgins whose pretty hair breathed religious innocence, appeared to the eye like phantoms who would vanish at a breath. Then there were aristocratic beauties, haughty of expression, but indolent, willowy, slender, graceful, bending their heads as if they still had

the favor of royalty to sell. An Englishwoman, a chaste, fair, ethereal figure, descended from the clouds of Ossian, resembled an angel of melancholy, remorse fleeing from crime. The Parisian, whose whole beauty consists in an indescribable grace, vain of her dress and her wit, armed with her all-powerful weakness, pliant and unyielding, a siren without heart or passion, but possessed of the secret of creating the treasures of passion by artificial means, and of counterfeiting the accents of the heart, was not lacking to that dangerous assemblage, wherein shone fair Italians, apparently placid and conscientious in their bliss, buxom Normans with superb figures, Southern women with black hair and well-shaped eyes. You would have taken them for a convoy of Versailles beauties, assembled by Lebel, and with all their snares laid since morning, arriving like a troop of eastern slaves awakened by the slave-dealer, to depart at dawn.

They stood abashed, shamefaced, and crowded around the table like bees buzzing inside a hive. That shrinking embarrassment, a combination of reproach and coquetry, was either a premeditated method of seduction or was due to involuntary shame. Perhaps an impulse that a woman never completely abandons led them to wrap themselves in the cloak of virtue, in order to give more charm and piquancy to the extravagances of vice. Thus the plot devised by old Taillefer seemed likely to fail. Those reckless men seemed subjugated at first by the majestic power with which woman is endowed. There was

a murmur of admiration like sweetest music. Love had not kept company with intoxication; instead of a whirlwind of passion, the guests, taken by surprise in a moment of weakness, abandoned themselves to the bliss of a voluptuous trance. At the call of the poetic instinct which always dominates them, the artists studied with delight the delicate shades of difference between those choice beauties. Awakened by a thought attributable, it may be, to some emanation of carbonic acid from the champagne he had drunk, a philosopher shuddered as he thought of the disasters that brought those women thither,—women once worthy, perhaps, of the purest homage. Each of them doubtless had a heart-rending story to tell. Almost all had suffered infernal tortures, and dragged wearily in their train faithless men, broken promises, pleasures atoned for by misery.

The guests approached them courteously and conversations were entered into on subjects as diverse as the characters of those who took part in them. Groups were formed. You would have said that you were in a salon in good society where girls and young women were offering the guests, after dinner, the assistance that coffee, liqueurs, and sugar afford to gourmands embarrassed by the struggles of a refractory digestion. But soon an occasional laugh was heard, the murmur of conversation grew, voices were raised. The revel, subdued for a moment, threatened at intervals to break out anew. The alternations of silence and noise bore a vague resemblance to one of Beethoven's symphonies.

As the two friends were sitting together upon a luxurious couch, they saw a tall, well-proportioned girl approaching them—a girl of superb carriage, with irregular but animated and striking features, which made a deep impression by the strong contrasts they presented. Her black hair, curling wantonly, seemed already to have undergone the contests of love, and fell in fluffy masses over her broad shoulders, whose outlines were most attractive. Long dark tresses half concealed a majestic neck upon which the light gleamed at intervals, revealing the delicacy of its graceful curves. The skin, of the whiteness of ivory, set off the warm, living tones of her brilliant coloring. The eye, shaded by long lashes, emitted audacious flames, sparks of love! The lips, red and moist and slightly parted, invited a kiss. Her figure was powerful but amorously supple; her bust and arms were amply developed like those of Carracci's beautiful figures; nevertheless, she seemed active and flexible, and her energy indicated the agility of the panther, as the masculine elegance of her shape gave promise of ecstatic joy. Although the girl undoubtedly knew how to laugh and frolic, her eyes and her smile had a tendency to awe the beholder. Like the prophetesses possessed by demons, her aspect was better adapted to astonish than to please. All varieties of expression swept across her eloquent face *en masse* and like lightning flashes. Perhaps she would have delighted the soul of blasé mortals, but a young man would have feared her. She was a colossal statue, fallen

from the summit of some Grecian temple, sublime at a distance, but coarse when seen at close quarters. Nevertheless, her startling beauty was calculated to arouse the impotent, her voice to fascinate the deaf, her glances to reanimate old bones; Emile compared her vaguely to a tragedy of Shakespeare, an admirable arabesque in which joy shrieks aloud, in which love has an indefinable touch of savagery, in which the witchery of grace and the ardor of happiness succeed the fierce tumults of wrath; a monster that can bite or caress, laugh like a demon, weep like the angels, evoke in a single embrace all the seductions of the sex except the sighs of melancholy and the enchanting modesty of the virgin; and then, in another moment, bellow and rend her breast, shatter her passion and her lover; in a word, destroy herself after the fashion of a rebellious people. Clad in a dress of red velvet, she trampled with heedless foot some flowers that had already fallen from her companions' heads, and with disdainful hand held out a silver platter to the two friends. Proud of her beauty, proud of her vices, perhaps, she displayed a white arm, which stood out in sharp relief against the velvet! She was like the queen of pleasure, an image of human enjoyment, the enjoyment that scatters the treasure amassed by three generations, that laughs at corpses, makes sport of ancestors, dissolves pearls and thrones, makes young men old and often makes old men young; the enjoyment allowed to none but giants weary of power, tested by thought, or those to whom war has become a mere toy.

"What is your name?" Raphael asked her.

"Aquilina."

"Oho! so you come from *Venice Preserved!*" said Emile.

"Yes," she replied. "As the popes take new names when they rise above the heads of men, I took a new one when I rose above all women."

"Have you, like your patroness, a noble, redoubtable conspirator, who loves you and is capable of dying for you?" said Emile, eagerly, aroused by this suggestion of poesy.

"I had," was the reply. "But the guillotine was my rival. Hence I always wear some bits of red about my dress, so that my joy shall never go too far."

"Oh! if you let her tell the story of the four young men of La Rochelle, she'll never finish.—Pray be quiet, Aquilina! Haven't all women lovers to weep for? but all women haven't, as you have, the good fortune to lose them on a scaffold. Ah! I should much prefer to have mine lie in a ditch at Clamart than in the bed of a rival!"

These words were uttered in a soft, melodious voice by the most innocent, the prettiest, the sweetest little creature that ever issued from an enchanted egg under a fairy's wand. She had approached noiselessly and exhibited to the young men a refined face, a slender figure, blue eyes of bewitching modesty, smooth, white temples. A blushing naiad, escaped from her stream, could be no fairer, no more timid, no more artless than that girl, who seemed to

be about sixteen, to know naught of evil, or of love, or of the tempests of life, but to have come from a church where she had been praying to the angels to obtain her recall to Heaven before her time. Nowhere save in Paris do we meet those innocent-eyed creatures, who conceal the most utter depravity, the most exquisite refinements of vice, beneath a brow as pure and smooth as the blossom of a marguerite.

Misled at first by the divine promises written in the young girl's alluring charms, Emile and Raphael accepted the coffee, which she poured into the cups presented by Aquilina, and began to question her. She completed the transfiguration of some aspect of human life in the eyes of the two poets, by a sort of baleful allegory, presenting, in striking contrast to the rough, passionate expression of her imposing companion, a picture of cold, voluptuously cruel corruption, reckless enough to commit a crime, strong-minded enough to laugh at it; a sort of devil without a heart, who punishes loving, expansive souls for feeling the emotions of which she is deprived, who always has a grimace of love to sell, tears for the funeral of her victim, and delight in reading his will in the evening. A poet would have admired the fair Aquilina; the whole world should have fled from the touching Euphrasie: one was the soul of vice; the other, vice without a soul.

"I should like to know if you ever think of the future?" Emile asked the pretty creature.

"The future?" she replied, with a laugh. "What do you call the future? Why should I ever think of

something that doesn't yet exist? I never look forward or back. As if one didn't have too much to do to think about one day at a time! Besides, the future, we all know, means the hospital."

"How can you see the hospital at this distance and not avoid going there?" cried Raphael.

"Why, what is there so terrible about the hospital?" demanded the awe-inspiring Aquilina. "As we are neither mothers nor wives, when old age puts black stockings on our legs and wrinkles on our foreheads, withers all the woman there is in us, and banishes pleasure from our friends' faces, of what can we have any need? Then you no longer see anything of our beauty but its original mire that walks on two legs, cold, dried up, decomposed, and making a noise like the rustling of dead leaves. The prettiest bits of finery become rags on us, the amber that perfumed our boudoirs takes on an odor of death and smells of the skeleton; then, if there happens to be a heart in that mud, you all insult it, you don't even allow us a memory. And so, when that time comes in our lives, whether we're in a fine house with dogs to care for, or in a hospital sorting rags, isn't our life just about the same? To hide our white hairs under a handkerchief with red and blue squares or under rich lace, to sweep the streets with a broom or the steps of the Tuileries with a satin skirt, to be seated in front of a gilded fireplace or to warm one's self with hot ashes in a red earthen pot, to attend an execution on La Grève or go to the Opéra—is there so much difference, after all?"

"*Aquilina mia*, you were never so near right in the midst of your despair," said Euphrasie. "Yes, cashmeres, laces, perfumes, gold, silk, luxury, everything that glitters, everything one likes—it all goes with youth. Time alone could prevail against our follies, but happiness gives us absolution for them.—You laugh at what I say," she continued, darting a venomous smile at the two friends; "but am I not right? I prefer to die of pleasure rather than of disease. I have neither a mania for living forever, nor any great respect for the human race, when I see what God does with it! Give me millions, I will spend them; I wouldn't keep a centime for next year. To live to please, and to reign, that's the decree that every beat of my heart pronounces. Society approves my course; doesn't it always furnish me with the means of dissipation? Why does the good Lord give me every morning the income of what I spend every evening? why do you build hospitals for us? As He has never put us between good and evil so that we could choose what wounds us or bores us, I should be a great fool not to enjoy myself."

"And the others?" said Emile.

"The others? Why, let them suit themselves! I would rather laugh at their suffering than have to weep over my own. I defy any man to cause me the slightest pang."

"What have you suffered to lead you to think thus?" asked Raphael.

"I was abandoned for an inheritance!" she said,

assuming an attitude which displayed all her charms at their best. "And yet I had passed days and nights working to support my lover! I don't propose to be deceived again by a smile or promise from anyone, and I do propose to make my life one long pleasure-party."

"But doesn't happiness come from the soul?" cried Raphael.

"Very good," rejoined Aquilina; "is it nothing to be admired and flattered, to triumph over all other women, even the most virtuous, by crushing them with our beauty and our wealth? Besides, we live more in a day than an honest bourgeoise in ten years, and that's all we want."

"Isn't a woman without virtue an odious creature?" said Emile to Raphael.

Euphrasie bestowed the glance of a viper on them, and retorted, with an inimitable accent of irony:

"Virtue! we leave that to the ugly and the hunchbacked. What would they amount to without it, poor things?"

"Come, come, be quiet!" cried Emile, "don't talk of what you know nothing about."

"Ah. I don't know about it!" retorted Euphrasie. "To give up your whole life to a man you hate, to bring up children who desert you, and to thank them when they stab you to the heart—those are the virtues you want woman to have; and then, to reward her for her self-sacrifice, you come and torture her by trying to seduce her, and if she resists, you compromise her reputation. A fine life that! It's quite

as well to remain free, to love those who please us, and to die young."

"Aren't you afraid of having to pay for all this some day?"

"Oh! well," she replied, "life, instead of being a mixture of pleasure and sorrow, will be divided into two parts; a youth that is certainly full of sport, and an old age that I know nothing about, during which I shall suffer at my ease."

"She has never loved," said Aquilina, in her deep voice. "She has never travelled a hundred leagues to devour with ecstasy a glance or a rebuff; she has never fastened her life to a hair, nor tried to stab two or three men in order to save her sovereign, her lord, her god. To her, love has been simply a dapper little colonel."

"Aha! *La Rochelle*," replied Euphrasie, "love is like the wind, we don't know where it comes from. Besides, if you had been loved by a stupid animal, you would have a horror of men of wit."

"The Code forbids us to love animals," retorted the stately Aquilina, ironically.

"I thought you were more indulgent to soldiers!" cried Euphrasie, with a laugh.

"How lucky they are to be able thus to lay aside their reason!" observed Raphael.

"Lucky!" said Aquilina, with a smile of pity and terror, as she cast a glance of awful meaning at the two friends. "Ah! you don't know what it is to be condemned to debauchery with death in your heart."

An observer who had happened to cast his eye into the salons at that moment would have caught a premature glimpse of Milton's Pandemonium. The blue flames of the punch colored with an infernal hue the faces of those who were still able to drink. Wild dances, instinct with frantic energy, aroused shrieks of laughter which burst forth like the detonations of fireworks. The boudoir and a small salon adjoining presented the picture of a battle-field, strewn as they were with dead and dying. The atmosphere was hot with wine and lust and excited words. Drunkenness, passion, delirium, forgetfulness of the world, were in men's hearts, on their faces, written on the carpets, indicated by the prevailing confusion, and drew filmy veils over all eyes and caused them to see intoxicating vapors in the air. The room was filled with glittering dust, like that which plays in the shafts of light cast by a sunbeam, and through it could be seen the most fanciful shapes struggling in grotesque attitudes. Here and there groups of enlaced figures were blended with the white marble statues, noble masterpieces of sculpture, which embellished the apartments.

Athough the two friends still retained a sort of perfidious lucidity in their ideas and in their organs of speech,—a last quiver, an imperfect imitation of life,—it was impossible for them to determine how much reality there was in the extraordinary fantasies, in the supernatural pictures that passed incessantly before their wearied eyes. The stifling atmosphere of our dreams, the ardent beauty that faces assume

in our visions, and, above all, an indefinable feeling of agility laden with chains—in a word, the most unfamiliar phenomena of sleep assailed them so vigorously, that they took the frolics of that debauch for the caprices of a nightmare in which everything takes place noiselessly and the shrieks are lost to the ear. At that moment, the banker's confidential valet succeeded, not without difficulty, in calling his master into the reception-room, and said in his ear:

"Monsieur, all the neighbors are at their windows and complaining of the noise."

"If they're afraid of the noise, they can spread straw in front of their doors, can't they?" cried Taillefer.

Raphael suddenly emitted a burst of laughter so entirely unseasonable that his friend called him to account for that brutal exhibition of delight.

"You would find it hard to understand me," he replied. "In the first place, I should have to confess that you stopped me on Quai Voltaire just as I was going to jump into the Seine, and of course you would like to know my reasons for seeking death. But if I should add that, by an almost supernatural chance, the most poetic ruins of the material world had just then been placed summarily before my eyes by a symbolic translation of human wisdom; whereas at this moment the débris of all the intellectual treasures we pillaged at table is reduced to these two women, living and original images of folly, and our profound indifference to men and things has served

as a transition from one to the other of two highly-colored pictures of two systems of existence diametrically opposed to each other—would you know any more about it? If you were not drunk, perhaps you would see a suggestion of philosophy in what I say."

"If you hadn't both feet on the enchanting Aquilina, whose snoring bears a curious analogy to the rumbling of a storm just ready to burst," replied Emile, who was amusing himself by twisting and untwisting Euphrasie's hair, without any very clear idea what he was doing, "you would blush for your drunkenness and your loquacity. Your two systems may be expressed in a single phrase and reduced to a single thought. Simple, instinctive life leads to some insane sort of wisdom, through stifling our intelligence by work; whereas a life passed in the empty void of abstractions or in the abysses of the moral world leads to foolish wisdom. In a word, to kill the feelings in order to live to old age, or to accept the martyrdom of passion and die young, is our doom. And still that sentence conflicts with the temperaments bestowed upon us by the rough jester to whom we owe the pattern of all created things."

"Idiot!" cried Raphael, interrupting him. "Go on abridging yourself thus and you will make volumes! If I had undertaken to formulate those two ideas briefly, I would have told you that man is corrupted by the exercise of his reasoning power and purified by ignorance. That is an indictment against society! But whether we live with the wise men or

die with the fools, is not the result, sooner or later, the same? That is why the great extractor of quintessences once expressed the two systems in two words: CARYMARY, CARYMARA."

"You make me doubt the power of God, for you're stupider than He is powerful," rejoined Emile. "Our dear Rabelais solved the problem by a word shorter than *Carymary, Carymara;* that word is *Peut-être,* from which Montaigne derived his *Que sais-je?* However, these ultimata of moral science are hardly more than the exclamation of Pyrrho hesitating between good and evil, as Buridan's ass hesitated between two measures of oats. But let us drop this everlasting discussion which always ends in *yes* and *no* in these days. What experiment had you in mind to make by jumping into the Seine? were you jealous of the hydraulic machine on Pont Notre-Dame?"

"Ah! if you knew my life!"

"Ah!" echoed Emile, "I didn't think you were so commonplace; that phrase is played out. Don't you know that we all claim to suffer more than other people?"

"Ah!" sighed Raphael.

"What a clown you are with your *Ah!* Tell me: is it a disease of the mind or the body that, by a contraction of your muscles, compels you to bring back every morning the horses that are to quarter you at night, as in the case of Damiens? Have you eaten your dog raw, without salt, in your garret? Have your children ever said to you: 'I'm hungry?'

Have you sold your mistress's tresses for money to gamble with? Have you ever been to a fictitious domicile to pay a forged note of hand, drawn by a fictitious uncle, with a dread of arriving too late? Come, I am listening! If you were going to drown yourself on account of a woman or a protested note, or because you were bored, I deny you. Confess, tell no lies; I don't ask you for historical memoirs. Above all things, be as brief as your drunken condition will allow you to be; I am as exacting as a reader, and as ready to fall asleep as a woman reading her vespers."

"Poor fool!" said Raphael. "Since when has grief ceased to be proportioned to sensitiveness? When we attain the degree of scientific knowledge that will enable us to write a natural history of hearts, to name them, classify them by species, sub-species, and families, as crustacea, fossils, saurians, microscopic varieties, and—God knows what else, then, my good fellow, it will be demonstrated that there are hearts as tender, as delicate as flowers, which are likely to be broken as flowers are by a light touch which certain mineral hearts do not even feel."

"Oh! in pity's name, spare me your preface," said Emile, with a half-smiling, half-piteous expression, as he took Raphael's hand.

II

THE WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART

*

After a moment's pause, Raphael, with a careless gesture, began as follows:

"Really, I don't know that I ought not to attribute to the fumes of wine and punch the sort of lucidity of vision that enables me at this moment to view my whole life like a single picture in which the figures, the colors, the lights and shadows and half-tones, are faithfully reproduced. This poetic play of my imagination would not surprise me if it were not attended by a sort of contempt for my sufferings and for my past joys. Seen at a distance, my life seems to be contracted, as it were, by a moral phenomenon. That long, slow torture, which lasted ten years, may perhaps be described by a few sentences in which suffering will be naught but a thought, and pleasure a philosophical reflection. I judge instead of feeling—"

"You're as tiresome as a speech proposing an amendment," interposed Emile.

"That may be," rejoined Raphael, good-humoredly. "And so, in order not to abuse your ears, I'll spare you the first seventeen years of my life. Up to that time, I lived, like you and thousands

of others, the school or college life whose imaginary sorrows and real joys are our dearest memories; a life in which our surfeited stomachs demand Friday's vegetables again and again, so long as they have not tasted different ones; a happy life, whose achievements seem contemptible to us now, but which taught us to work, nevertheless."

"Come down to the story," said Emile, in a half-comical, half-complaining tone.

"When I left school," continued Raphael, asking leave to continue by a gesture, "my father subjected me to strict discipline, he made me sleep in a room adjoining his study; I went to bed at nine o'clock, and rose at five in the morning; he wanted me to study law conscientiously; I attended the School of Law and worked for a solicitor at the same time; but the laws of time and space were applied so pitilessly to my labors and my walks, and my father demanded such a strict account at dinner of—"

"What do I care for all that?" interrupted Emile.

"The devil fly away with you!" retorted Raphael. "How can you enter into my feelings if I don't tell you of the imperceptible facts which exerted an influence on my mind, shaped it by fear, and kept me for a long while in the primitive innocence of youth? Until I was twenty-one, I was ground down by a despotism as heartless as that of monastic regulations. To depict the joylessness of my life, it will suffice, perhaps, to describe my father: a tall, thin, austere man, with a face like a knife-blade, pale complexion,

sharp-spoken, as crabbed as an old maid, and fussy as a chief clerk. His paternity hovered over my mischievous and merry thoughts, and confined them as if beneath a leaden dome; if I attempted to manifest any affectionate or tender sentiment, he received me like a child who is on the point of saying something foolish; I feared him much more than we used to fear our schoolmasters; to him I was always a boy of eight. I can see him now before me. In his chestnut-colored frock-coat, in which he stood as stiffly erect as a Paschal taper, he looked like a smoked herring wrapped in the reddish cover of a pamphlet. And yet I loved my father: at heart, he was just. Perhaps we do not hate severity when it is justified by nobility of character, by pure morals, and is skilfully mingled with kindness. Although my father never left me, although, until I was twenty years old, I never had ten francs at my disposal,—ten rascals, ten libertines of francs, a vast treasure, which I longed in vain to possess, dreaming of the ineffable joys it would procure,—he did, at all events, try to afford me some diversion. After promising me a treat for many months, he took me to the Bouffons, to a concert, to a ball where I hoped to fall in with a mistress. A mistress! to me the thought meant independence. But, being shamefaced and shy, ignorant of the jargon of salons and knowing no one there, I returned home with my heart still whole and still swollen with vague desires. And the next morning, bridled by my father like a cavalry horse, I went back to my solicitor, to the school, to the Palais.

To attempt to turn aside from the straight path my father had marked out for me would have been to expose myself to his wrath; he had threatened to ship me off to the Antilles, as cabin-boy, at my first misstep. So that I shuddered horribly when by chance I ventured to join in some pleasure-party for an hour or two. Fancy the most rambling imagination, the most amorous heart, the most susceptible soul, the most poetic mind, constantly confronted by the most stony-hearted, the most unemotional, the moodiest man on earth; in short, marry a young girl to a skeleton, and you will understand the life whose curious incidents can only be mentioned: schemes of flight abandoned at sight of my father, despair soothed by sleep, desires repressed, dark melancholy banished by music. I exhaled my unhappiness in melody. Beethoven and Mozart were often my trustworthy confidants. I smile to-day as I recall all the prejudices that disturbed my conscience in those days of innocence and virtue: if I had stepped inside the door of a restaurant, I should have thought that I was lost forever; my imagination caused me to look upon a café as a place of debauchery, where men lost their honor and wasted their fortunes; as for risking money at play, I must first have had the money.

"Oh! even at the risk of putting you to sleep, I must tell you of one of the delirious joys of my life, one of those joys armed with claws, which sink into the heart, as the hot iron sinks into the convict's shoulder. I was at a ball at the house of the Duc de Navarreins, my father's cousin. But, in order

that you may fully understand my position, you must know that I wore a threadbare coat, badly-made shoes, a cab-driver's cravat, and gloves that had already been worn. I planted myself in a corner so that I could eat ices and stare at the pretty women at my ease. My father spied me. For some reason which I have never been able to guess,—that mark of confidence dazed me to such an extent,—he gave me his purse and his keys to keep. Ten steps away several men were playing cards, I could hear the chink of gold. I was twenty years old, I longed to pass one whole day in crimes suited to my age. It was a sort of mental libertinage, a parallel to which can be found neither in the caprices of courtesans nor in the dreams of young girls. For a year past I had dreamed of being well dressed, sitting in a carriage with a lovely woman beside me, playing the nobleman, dining at Véry's, going to the play in the evening with my mind made up not to return home until the following day, but armed against my father's wrath with a story of an adventure as complicated as the plot of the *Mariage de Figaro*, from which it would have been impossible for him to extricate himself. I had reckoned all that bliss at fifty crowns. Was I not still under the innocent spell that charms the truant? So I went into a boudoir, and there, all by myself, with glowing eyes and trembling fingers, I counted my father's money: a hundred crowns! All the delights of my escapade appeared before me, evoked anew by that vast sum, dancing like the witches in *Macbeth* around

their caldron, but alluring, quivering, delicious! I became a determined knave. Paying no heed to the ringing in my ears or the hurried beating of my heart, I took two twenty-franc pieces, which I can see at this moment! The dates were worn off and Bonaparte's face grinned at me from them. Having replaced the purse in my pocket, I walked toward one of the card-tables with the two gold pieces in my moist palm, and I prowled about the players as a hawk prowls about a hen-coop. In inexpressible anguish of mind, I suddenly cast a keen glance about me. Certain that no one whom I knew could see me, I bet on a fat, jolly little man, over whose head I accumulated more heartfelt prayers than are offered up at sea during three tempests. Then, with an instinctive villainy or machiavelianism surprising at my age, I stationed myself near a door, looking through the salons, but, seeing nothing, my soul and my eyes were fluttering around the fatal green cloth. From that evening dates the first physiological observation to which I owe that species of penetration which has enabled me to grasp some of the mysteries of our twofold nature. I turned my back on the table where my future happiness was battling, happiness the more intense, perhaps, for being criminal; between the two gamblers and myself there was a hedge, four or five thick, of men conversing; the hum of voices prevented my hearing the clink of the gold which blended with the music of the orchestra; despite all those obstacles, by virtue of the privilege accorded the passions of annihilating space and time,

I distinctly heard the words of the two gamblers, I knew what points they made and which of them turned the king as well as if I had seen the cards; in fact, ten yards away from the game, I turned pale at its fluctuations.

"Suddenly my father passed me, and then I understood the passage of the Gospel: 'The spirit of God passed before his face!' I had won. Through the moving mass of men hovering about the players, I hurried to the table, gliding along with the dexterity of an eel making its escape through the broken mesh of a net. My fibres, but now throbbing with pain, throbbed with joy. I was like a condemned man who has met the king on his way to the scaffold. As it happened, a man who wore a decoration claimed that forty francs were missing. I was suspected by restless eyes, I turned pale, and drops of perspiration rolled down my forehead. The crime of stealing from my father seemed to me adequately punished. But the good little fat man said, in a voice that was certainly angelic: 'All these gentlemen put up their money,' and he paid the forty francs. I raised my head and cast a triumphant glance upon the gamblers. After restoring to my father's purse the money I had taken from it, I left my profits with the same excellent and honorable gentleman, who continued to win. As soon as I found myself the possessor of a hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them in my handkerchief so that they could not move or make a sound while we were returning home, and I ceased to play.

"'What were you doing at the card-tables?' my father asked me, as we entered the cab.

"'I was looking on,' I replied, trembling.

"'I shouldn't have been surprised,' rejoined my father, 'if your self-respect had led you to put a little money on the cloth. In the eyes of men of the world you look old enough to be entitled to do foolish things. So I would forgive you, Raphael, if you had used my purse.'

"I made no reply. When we reached home, I gave my father his keys and his money. As he entered his bedroom he emptied the purse on the mantel-shelf, counted the gold, turned to me with a very gracious expression, and said, with a significant pause of some length after every word:

"'My son, you will soon be twenty years old. I am satisfied with you. You must have an allowance, if for no other purpose than to teach you to economize, to understand the affairs of life. I propose to give you a hundred francs a month, beginning to-day. You may dispose of your money as you see fit. Here is your allowance for the first quarter,' he added, patting the pile of gold as if to verify the amount.

"I confess that I almost threw myself at his feet, and confessed to him that I was a thief, a vile wretch, and, worse than all, a liar! Shame held me back. I attempted to kiss him, but he gently repulsed me.

"'Now you are a man, *my child*,' he said! 'What I am doing is a very simple, just thing, for which you must not thank me. If I have any claim to

your gratitude, Raphael,' he continued, in a mild but very dignified tone, 'it is for having preserved your youth from the misfortunes which destroy all young men in Paris. Henceforth we shall be two friends. In a year you will have your doctor's degree in law. You have, not without some annoyances and privations, acquired the solid knowledge and love of work so essential for men who are called upon to manage large affairs. Learn to know me, Raphael. I do not wish to make of you an advocate or a notary, but a statesman who may become the glory of our poor family.—Until to-morrow!' he added, dismissing me with a mysterious wave of the hand.

"From that day my father frankly admitted me to the secret of his plans. I was an only son, and I had lost my mother ten years before. Long ago, my father, the head of a historic family almost forgotten in Auvergne, being far from proud of the right to till his fields with a sword at his side, came to Paris to fight with the devil. Endowed with that shrewdness of wit which makes the men of the South so superior to other men, when it is accompanied with energy, he succeeded, without any considerable influence to support him, in attaining a position at the very centre of power. The Revolution soon reversed his fortunes; but he had married the daughter of a great house, and, under the Empire, was on the point of restoring to our family its pristine splendor. The Restoration, which restored considerable property to my mother, ruined my father. Having formerly purchased several estates in foreign lands given by the

Emperor to his generals, he had been fighting for ten years with liquidators and diplomatists, with the Prussian and Bavarian tribunals, to maintain himself in the disputed possession of those luckless properties. My father cast me into the inextricable labyrinths of that vast lawsuit upon which our future depended. We might be required to return the revenues as well as the value of certain cuttings of wood between 1814 and 1817; in that case my mother's property would hardly suffice to save the honor of our name. So it was that, on the very day when my father seemed in a certain sense to have emancipated me, I fell under the most odious of yokes. I must fight as one fights on a battle-field, work night and day, call upon statesmen, try to divine their religious beliefs, to interest them in our affair, to influence them and their wives and their servants and their dogs, and disguise that horrible purpose under refined manners and pleasant jests. I understood all the sorrows that had left their withering imprints on my father's face. For about a year I led, to outward appearance, the life of a man of the world, but that dissipation and my eagerness to become intimate with relatives who were in favor, or with people who might be useful to us, concealed an immense amount of work. My amusements were legal arguments and my conversations memorials. Thus far I had been virtuous by reason of the impossibility of gratifying a young man's passions; but, at this time, fearing to cause my father's ruin or my own by any negligence, I became my own tyrant and did not dare indulge

myself in any diversion or extravagance. When we are young, before the continual friction of men and affairs has deprived us of the delicate flower of sentiment, the freshness of thought, the noble spotlessness of conscience which prevents us from ever compromising with evil, we feel our duties keenly; our honor speaks in a loud voice and makes us listen; we are outspoken and without guile; such was I at that time. I determined to justify my father's confidence; formerly I might have taken delight in pilfering a paltry sum from him; but, as I shared with him the burden of his affairs, his name, his family, I would have given him secretly any property or hopes I might have had, as I did sacrifice my pleasure to him and was happy in the sacrifice. And so, when Monsieur Villèle exhumed, for our express benefit, an imperial decree concerning forfeitures, and thereby ruined us, I signed a deed of all my property, reserving only an island of no value, in the Loire, where my mother was buried. To-day, perhaps, I should not lack arguments, sophistries, philosophic, philanthropical, and political reasons for refraining from doing what my solicitor called an *idiotic thing;* but at twenty-one, we are, I repeat, all generosity, all ardor, all love. The tears that I saw in my father's eyes were to me the fairest of fortunes, and the memory of those tears has often comforted me in my misery.

"Ten months after paying his creditors, my father died of grief; he idolized me and he had ruined me! that thought killed him. In 1826, toward the end of autumn, at the age of twenty-two, I followed to the

grave, entirely alone, the body of my earliest friend, my father. Few young men have had the fortune to find themselves, alone with their thoughts, behind a hearse in the streets of Paris, without means or prospects. Orphans rescued by public charity have at least the battle-field for their future, the government or the king's attorney for their father, an asylum for shelter. But I had nothing! Three months later, an official appraiser handed me eleven hundred and twelve francs, the net proceeds of the settlement of my father's estate. The creditors had compelled me to sell our furniture. Being accustomed from my youth to place great value on the objects of luxury by which I was surrounded, I could not refrain from expressing some astonishment at sight of that very modest sum.

"'Oh!' said the appraiser, 'it was all very *rococo!*'

"A ghastly word, that destroyed all the religious ideas of my childhood and deprived me of my first illusions, the dearest of all. My fortune consisted of a memorandum of sale, my future lay in a canvas bag which contained eleven hundred and twelve francs, society appeared to me in the person of an official appraiser, who talked to me with his hat on.—A valet who was attached to me, and upon whom my mother had long before settled an annuity of four hundred francs,—his name is Jonathas,—said to me as we left the house from which, in my childhood, I had so often driven happily away in a carriage:

"'Be very saving, Monsieur Raphael!'

"The good fellow was weeping.

"Such, my dear Emile, were the events that controlled my destiny, modified my ideas, and placed me, still a young man, in the falsest of all social positions," said Raphael, after a short pause. "I was connected by family ties—feeble ones, by the way—with several wealthy houses, from which my pride would have kept me away, even if contempt and indifference had not already closed their doors to me. Although I was related to some persons of great influence who were very lavish of their patronage to strangers, I had neither kinsmen nor patrons. My mind, being constantly checked in its impulse to expand, fell back upon itself. Although by nature frank and ingenuous, it was my fate to appear cold and deceitful; my father's tyranny had deprived me of all confidence in myself; I was shy and awkward, I did not believe that my voice could exert the slightest influence, I was disgusted with myself, I considered myself ugly, I was ashamed of my appearance. Despite the inward voice which should sustain men of talent in their struggles and which cried out to me: 'Courage! march on!' despite the sudden revelations of my power in solitude, despite the hope that possessed me as I compared recent works admired by the public with those that were taking shape in my thoughts, I distrusted myself like a child. I was the victim of overweening ambition, I believed that I was destined for great things and I felt that I was a nullity. I needed the aid of men and I had no friends. I was

fitted to break out a path for myself in the world, and I remained alone, less fearful than ashamed. When I was tossed by my father into the vortex of fashionable society, I carried thither an untried heart and a fresh mind. Like all great children, I aspired secretly to a grand passion. I met among the young men of my age a bevy of braggarts who went about with their heads in the air, chattering nonsense, sitting without a tremor beside women who seemed to me the most imposing of their sex, making impertinent remarks, gnawing the end of their canes, posing, corrupting the most attractive girls, putting or affecting to have put their heads on every pillow, pretending to be sated with pleasure, esteeming the most virtuous and most prudish women easy conquests, to be vanquished by a word, by the slightest audacious gesture, by the first insolent glance! I vow on my soul and conscience that the conquest of power or great literary renown seemed to me less difficult of attainment than success with a woman of high rank, young and clever and affable. Thus I found the vexations of my heart, my sentiments, my cults out of harmony with the maxims of society. I was bold, but in my mind only, not in my manners. I learned later that women do not want to be solicited; I have seen many whom I adored at a distance, to whom I devoted a heart loyal under every test, a soul to rend, a vigorous passion for which sacrifices and torture had no terrors: they belonged to fools whom I wouldn't have had for porters. How many times have I, standing motionless and dumb, gazed

in admiration at the woman of my dreams, floating by me at a ball; mentally consecrating my whole life to never-ending caresses, I would crowd all my hopes into a glance, and offer her in my feverish ecstasy a young man's love that invited deception. At certain times I would have given my life for a single night. Ah! well, having never found an ear into which to pour my impassioned words, a glance upon which to rest my own, a heart to understand my heart, I suffered all the torment of an impotent activity which devoured itself, for lack of courage or opportunity, or from inexperience. Perhaps I despaired of making myself understood, or trembled lest I should be understood too well. And yet I had a tempest all ready to break out at every courteous glance that was bestowed upon me. Despite the promptitude with which I seized upon such a glance or upon words apparently affectionate as evidences of tender regard, I never dared to speak or to hold my peace opportunely. From very stress of feeling my words were unmeaning and my silence seemed boorish. Doubtless I was too ingenuous for an artificial society that lives by artificial light, that expresses all its thoughts in conventional phrases or in words dictated by fashion. Then I had not the secret of speaking when I was silent or of keeping silent when I spoke. In short, as I kept the fires that consumed me confined within my bosom, although I had such a heart as women long to find, although I was beset by the emotions that they covet, and possessed the energy upon which

fools plume themselves, all women have been treacherously cruel to me. I artlessly admired the heroes I have mentioned, when they celebrated their triumphs, never suspecting them of falsehood. I was wrong, doubtless, to desire a love that depended on words, to expect to find in the heart of a fickle, frivolous woman, hungry for luxury, drunk with vanity, that whole-souled, strong, noble passion, that ocean that was beating tempestuously against the walls of my heart. Oh! to feel that one was born to love, to make a woman blissfully happy, and to have found no one, not even a brave and noble Marcellina, or an old marchioness! To carry treasures in one's wallet, and to fall in with no child, no inquisitive girl, to whose admiring eyes to exhibit them! I have often thought of killing myself in despair."

"You are charmingly tragic this evening!" observed Emile.

"O! let me revile my life," replied Raphael. "If your friendship isn't strong enough to listen to my lamentations, if you can't trust me for half an hour of *ennui*, why, go to sleep! But don't ask me again to explain my suicide, which growls and rears its head and summons me, and which I salute. To pass judgment on a man one must at least be in the secret of his thoughts, his misfortunes, his emotions; to seek to know nothing of his life save the material events is to write chronology only, fools' history!"

The bitter tone in which these words were uttered made such an impression on Emile that, from that

moment, he bestowed all his attention on Raphael, gazing at him with a dazed expression.

"But," continued the narrator, "the light that gives color to these incidents now imparts a new aspect to them. The order of things which I once considered a misfortune may perhaps have given birth to the noble faculties upon which at a later date I prided myself. Philosophical curiosity, excessive toil, the love of reading, which from the age of seven until my entrance into society constantly occupied my time, undoubtedly endowed me with the facility with which, if I am to believe you, I am able to express my ideas, and to march forward through the vast field of human knowledge. May not the solitude to which I was condemned, the habit of forcing back my feelings and living in my heart, have given me the power to meditate and compare? Has not my sensibility, not being masked in the service of worldly emotions which belittle the mind and reduce it to rags, become so concentrated as to be this perfect organ of a will more exalted than the dictates of passion? Misunderstood by women, I remember watching them with the keen eye of love disdained. Now I see that the sincerity of my character may well have been offensive! Perhaps the women prefer a little hypocrisy. I, who am by turns, in the same hour, a man and a child, frivolous and thoughtful, without prejudices and full of superstition, often a woman like themselves—may they not well have mistaken my artlessness for cynicism, and the very purity of my thought for

libertinage? To them knowledge was a bore, feminine languor a sign of weakness. That excessive nobility of the imagination, the curse of poets, doubtless caused me to be deemed a creature incapable of love, wavering in his ideas, devoid of energy. An idiot to all appearances when I was silent, it may be that I frightened them when I tried to make myself agreeable, and the women condemned me. I accepted, in tears and sorrow, the decree pronounced by society. That grief bore fruit. I determined to revenge myself on society, I determined to obtain possession of the souls of all those women by subjecting their intellects to mine, and to see all eyes turned upon me when my name should be uttered by a valet at the door of a salon. I had constituted myself a great man from my childhood. I had struck my forehead, saying to myself, like André Chénier: 'There is something there!' I fancied that I could feel within me a thought seeking expression, a system to establish, a science to expound.

"O my dear Emile! to-day, when I am barely twenty-six years old, when I am sure of dying unknown, without ever having been the lover of the woman I have dreamed of possessing, let me tell you of my follies! Have not all of us mistaken our desires for realities, more or less? Ah! I would not care to have for a friend a young man who has never in his dreams fashioned garlands for himself, constructed a pedestal to stand upon, or endowed himself with obliging mistresses. For my part, I have

often been a general, an emperor; I have been Byron, then nothing. After sporting about at the summit of things human, I discovered that all the mountains, all the difficulties, were still to be surmounted. The vast self-love that was boiling within me, the sublime faith in a noble destiny, which becomes genius, perhaps, when a man does not allow his soul to be torn by contact with affairs as readily as a sheep gives up its wool to the brambles in the hedges through which it passes—that self-love and that faith saved me. I determined to cover myself with glory and to work in silence for the mistress I hoped some day to have. All women were summed up in a single one, and that one I expected to meet in the first that my eye fell upon; but, as I saw a queen in each of them, one and all, like queens who make advances to their lovers, must needs come half-way to meet poor, timid, miserable me! Ah! I had in my heart such a world of gratitude for the one who should take pity on me, to say nothing of my love, that I would have worshipped her all her life. Later, my observations taught me some cruel truths.

"Thus, my dear Emile, I was in danger of living alone forever. Women are accustomed, by virtue of some mysterious mental tendency, to see in a man of talent only his defects, and in a blockhead only his good qualities; they feel a great sympathy for the blockhead's good qualities, which are a constant flattery of their own defects, whereas the man of superior mind does not afford them enough enjoyment to make up for his imperfections. Talent

is an intermittent fever, no woman is anxious to share its discomforts only; they all wish to find in their lovers something to gratify their vanity. They love themselves in us! Is not a poor, proud man, an artist, who possesses the power of creating, equipped with offensive egotism? There is all about him a sort of whirlpool of thoughts in which he envelops everything, even his mistress, who must needs follow its eddying currents. Can a woman accustomed to adulation believe in the love of such a man? Will she go out to look for him? Such a lover has not the time to loiter about a divan, devoting himself to the little emotional tricks by which women set such store, and which are the triumph of false and unfeeling men. He has not time enough for his work, how can he waste it in belittling and bedizening himself? Prepared to give my whole life at one stroke, I would not peddle it out at retail. Indeed, there is, in the manœuvring of a broker who executes the orders of a pale, affected woman, an indefinable baseness that fills the artist with disgust. Love in the abstract is not enough for a poor great man, he must have absolute devotion. The frivolous creatures who pass their lives trying on cashmeres, or who make cloak-pegs of themselves, are incapable of devotion; they demand it, however, and see nothing in love but the pleasure of commanding, not that of obeying. The true wife in heart and flesh and blood allows herself to be led wherever he goes, in whom her life, her strength, her glory, her happiness reside. Men of superior

parts require wives of the Eastern sort, whose only thought should be to study their wants; for, to them, unhappiness consists in a lack of harmony between their desires and the means of gratifying them. And I, who deemed myself a man of genius, fell in love with just such silly, affected women! Cherishing ideas contrary to all accepted ideas, aspiring to scale the walls of heaven without a ladder, possessing treasures not in current coin, equipped with extensive knowledge which overburdened my memory, and which I had not as yet classified, which I had not even digested; finding myself without kindred or friends, alone in the midst of the most horrible desert, a paved, crowded, living, thinking desert, where everything is worse than hostile—indifferent! the resolution I formed was natural, although insane; there was a flavor of impossibility about it that gave me courage. It was like a bet made with myself, in which I was both bettor and stake.

"This was my plan. My eleven hundred francs would keep me alive for three years, and I gave myself that length of time to produce a work that would attract the attention of the public to me and bring me fortune or a name. I rejoiced at the thought that I was going to live on bread and milk like a recluse of the Thebaid, buried in the world of books and ideas, in an inaccessible retreat in the very heart of this tumultuous Paris, a sphere of toil and silence, where, like the chrysalides, I would build myself a tomb, preparing for a glorious and brilliant new birth. I was about to risk death for life's sake. By

reducing existence to its real wants, to what was absolutely necessary, I found that three hundred and sixty-five francs a year would suffice to support my poverty. And that small sum did actually keep me alive so long as I chose to undergo my self-imposed monastic discipline."

"It isn't possible!" cried Emile.

"I lived in that way nearly three years," replied Raphael, with a sort of pride. "Let us reckon it up," he continued. "Three sous' worth of bread, two of milk, three of scraps of pork, prevented me from dying of hunger and kept my mind in a state of extraordinary lucidity. I have remarked, as you know, many wonderful effects of diet on the imagination. My lodgings cost me three sous a day, I burned three sous' worth of oil during the night, I did my own chamberwork, I wore flannel shirts so that my washing cost me only two sous a day. I burned peat, and my year's bill, divided by the number of days in the year, never showed an average expenditure of more than two sous. I had clothes, linen, and shoes that I wore for three years; I dressed up only when I went to certain public courses of lectures or to the libraries. All those items combined made only eighteen sous; that left me two sous for unforeseen expenses. I do not remember that, during that long period of hard work, I once crossed Pont des Arts, or that I ever bought any water; I used to go and draw it in the morning at the fountain on Place Saint-Michel, at the corner of Rue des Grès. Oh! I carried my poverty proudly. A man who

looks forward to a glorious future walks in his days of want like an innocent man on his way to the gallows—he has no shame! I did not choose to anticipate illness. Like Aquilina, I looked the hospital in the face without fear. I did not, for a moment, doubt that I should enjoy good health. At all events, the poor man takes to his bed only to die. I cut my own hair until an angel of love or kindness— But I do not mean to go ahead of my story. Simply understand, my friend, that, in default of a mistress, I lived with a noble thought, a dream, a falsehood in which we all begin by placing more or less faith. To-day I laugh at myself, at that *myself*, a sacred and sublime creature it may be, who has ceased to exist. Society, the world, our customs, our morals, seen at close quarters, disclosed to me the danger of my innocent faith and the fruitlessness of my earnest toil. Such impedimenta are useless to the ambitious man. Light should be the baggage of the man who pursues fortune! The great mistake of superior men consists in wasting their early years in making themselves worthy of favor. While the poor fellows are storing up their strength and their learning in order to carry without effort the burden of a power which eludes them, the schemers, rich in words and paupers in ideas, go and come, take the fools by surprise, and effect a lodgment in the confidence of semi-idiots: the former study, the others keep moving; those are modest, these self-assertive; the man of genius imposes silence on his pride, the schemer hoists his to the mast-head; he cannot help succeeding. The

men in power find it so necessary to believe in ready-made merit, in self-applauding talent, that it is childish folly in the true scholar to hope for human reward. I certainly have no desire to paraphrase the commonplaces of virtue, the Song of Songs everlastingly sung by unappreciated geniuses: I desire to reason out logically the explanation of the frequent successes achieved by men of moderate parts. Alas! study is so like a mother in its kindliness, that, perhaps, it is criminal to ask other rewards at its hands than the pure, sweet joy with which it feeds its children. I remember that I sometimes dipped my bread gayly in my milk as I ate by my window inhaling the pure air, letting my eyes wander over a landscape of roofs brown, gray, and red, slated or tiled, or covered with green and yellow moss. If the outlook seemed monotonous to me at first, I soon discovered extraordinary beauties in it. Sometimes, in the evening, luminous rays streaming through half-closed shutters enlivened the dark depths of that original landscape with alternations of light and shade. Sometimes the pale gleam of the street lanterns projected yellowish reflections through the mist from below and outlined indistinctly the crowded roofs, an ocean of motionless waves. Sometimes, too, occasional figures appeared in the midst of that silent desert; among the flowers of some aërial garden I caught a glimpse of the angular, hook-nosed profile of an old woman watering her nasturtiums, or, framed by a rotting garret-window, a young girl making her toilet, thinking that she was alone,

whose lovely forehead only I could see and the long hair uplifted by a shapely, white arm. I took delight in the sparse patches of ephemeral vegetation in the gutters, poor bits of grass soon washed away by some storm! I studied the mosses, whose colors the rain brightened, and which changed in the sunlight to dry, brown velvet with fantastic reflections. And then the fleeting, poetic effects of the daylight, the melancholy of the fog, the sudden bursts of sunlight, the silence and witchery of the night, the mysteries of the dawn, the smoke rising from every chimney, all the details of that strange scene, as they became familiar to me, furnished entertainment for me. I loved my imprisonment, it was voluntary. Those Parisian prairies formed by roofs as level as a field, but covering abysses swarming with people, appealed to my heart and harmonized with my thoughts. It is tiresome to come suddenly upon the world once more, when we descend from the celestial heights to which scientific meditation carries us; at such times I understood perfectly the bare walls of monasteries.

"When I had fully determined to follow my new scheme of life, I sought lodgings in the most deserted quarters of Paris. One evening, as I was returning home from the Estrapade, I happened to pass through Rue des Cordiers. At the corner of Rue de Cluny I saw a little girl of some fourteen years, playing shuttlecock with one of her friends, and entertaining the neighbors with her laughter and mischief. It was a fine, warm evening in September. Women were sitting in front of every door, chatting, as they do

in the provinces on a holiday. I noticed particularly the little girl, who had a wonderfully expressive face, and whose body was admirably posed for a painter. It was a fascinating scene. I looked about for an explanation of that exhibition of neighborliness in the heart of Paris, and discovered that the street led nowhere, and that there probably was but little travel there.

"Recalling Jean-Jacques Rousseau's residence in that locality, I found the Hôtel de Saint-Quentin; its dilapidated condition led me to hope that I might find an inexpensive lodging there, and I determined to look it over. Upon entering a low hall, I saw the classic copper candlesticks with their candles, arranged in order over each key, and I was impressed by the neatness of the hall, which in most lodging-houses receives little attention, and which I found as carefully swept and dusted as a *genre* picture; the blue bed, the utensils, the furniture, all displayed a sort of conventional coquetry. The mistress of the house, a woman of about forty, whose face bore evidence of past misfortunes, whose glance was dimmed by tears, rose and came to meet me; I humbly set before her the limit of my capacity in the matter of rent, whereupon, without manifesting the least surprise, she selected a certain key and led me up to the attic, where she showed me a room that looked out upon the neighboring roofs, upon the courtyards of the adjoining houses, from whose windows protruded long poles laden with linen. Nothing could be more horrible than that garret with its

dirty, yellow walls, which smelt of poverty, and called aloud for its impecunious student. The ceiling was sloping and the loosened tiles afforded glimpses of the sky. There was room for a bed and a table and a few chairs, and I could find a place for my piano under the sharply sloping roof.

"Not being rich enough to furnish that cage, worthy of the *Leads* of Venice, the poor woman had never been able to let it. As I had reserved from the recent sale of my furniture those articles which were in a certain sense my personal effects, I soon came to terms with my hostess and took up my quarters in her house the next day. I lived in that aërial sepulchre nearly three years, working night and day without respite, and with so much enjoyment that study seemed to me the noblest occupation, the happiest solution of human life. There is an indefinable sweetness, intoxicating as love, in the tranquillity and silence necessary for the student. The exercise of the mind, the search for ideas, the placid meditations of knowledge, bring with them ineffable delight and indescribable, as everything is that has to do with the intellect, whose phenomena are invisible to our external senses. So it is that we are always compelled to explain the mysteries of the mind by material comparisons. The pleasure of swimming in a lake of pure water, amid rocks, woods, and flowers, alone and caressed by a balmy breeze, would give those who know nothing of it a very feeble image of the happiness I felt when my soul was bathed in the beams of some mysterious

light, when I listened to the confused and terrible voice of inspiration, when from an unknown spring images gushed into my wildly-beating brain. To see an idea springing up from the field of human abstractions, like the sun in the morning, and rising higher and higher like him, or, better still, growing like a child, arriving at the age of puberty, slowly becoming a man, is a joy superior to all other earthly joys—nay, it is a divine pleasure, rather. Study imparts a sort of magic to everything about us. The wretched desk on which I wrote and the brown leather with which it was covered, my piano, my bed, my armchair, the peculiarities of my wall-paper, my furniture, all those things seemed to be alive and became my humble friends, the silent accomplices of my future; how many times I have told them my thoughts as I looked about the room! Often, as my eyes wandered to a bit of warped moulding, I would discover new developments of my thought, a striking proof of my theory, or words that seemed to me apt to give expression to thoughts that were well-nigh untranslatable. By dint of gazing at the objects which surrounded me, I discovered a character, a countenance, for each one; often they spoke to me; when the setting sun cast a furtive beam over the roofs and in at my narrow window, they changed color, paled or brightened, were sad or merry, constantly surprising me by new effects.

"These petty incidents of solitary life, which escape the observation of the busy world, are the consolation of the prisoner. Was I not held captive by

an idea, imprisoned in a system, but sustained by the prospect of a life of renown! At every new difficulty surmounted I kissed the soft hands of the woman with lovely eyes, fashionable and wealthy, who was destined some day to caress my hair and say to me, with emotion:

"'You have suffered much, my poor, dear angel!'

*

"I had undertaken two great works. A comedy was to bring me renown within a few days, renown and fortune and admission to that social circle where I wished to reappear, invested with the royal prerogatives of the man of genius. You all considered that chef-d'œuvre the first mistake of a young man fresh from school, a genuine piece of childish nonsense. Your jocose remarks clipped the wings of divers fruitful illusions, which have never fluttered since. You alone, my dear Emile, poured balm on the deep wound that others inflicted on my heart! You alone expressed admiration for my *Theory of the Will*, that long work, in whose preparation I had studied the languages of the East, anatomy, and physiology, to which I had devoted the greater part of my time. That work, if I am not mistaken, will complete the labors of Mesmer, Lavater, Gall, and Bichat, by opening a new road to human learning. That point marks the close of my noble life, my life of daily sacrifice, of toil like a silk-worm's unknown to the world, whose only reward, perhaps, is in the toil itself. From the age of reason down to the day that I finished my *Theory*, I observed, learned, read, wrote, without rest, and my life was like one long, schoolboy's task. Effeminate in my fondness for oriental indolence, amorous of my visions, sensual by nature, I worked unremittingly,

refusing to taste the joys of Parisian life. Although a gourmand, I lived soberly; although fond of walking, and of travelling by sea, although there were several countries that I longed to visit, and although I still took pleasure, like a child, in skipping stones on the water, I remained seated at my desk, pen in hand; naturally loquacious, I listened silently to the professors at the public lectures at the Library and Museum; I slept on my solitary pallet like a monk of the order of Saint Benedict, and yet woman was my sole chimera, a chimera that I caressed and that constantly eluded me! In short, my life was a cruel antithesis, a never-ending lie. See now what creatures men are! Sometimes my natural impulses awoke like a long-smouldering fire. By virtue of a sort of mirage or tropical fever, I, bereft of all the women I coveted, penniless and living in an artist's garret, at such times fancied that I was surrounded by entrancing mistresses! I drove through the streets of Paris, reclining on the soft cushions of a superb carriage! I was consumed by vices, plunged in debauchery, greedy for everything and possessed of everything; in a word, drunk by fasting, like Saint Anthony in his temptation. Luckily, sleep put an end at last to those consuming visions; the next day study would beckon me with a smile, and I was loyal to it.

"I fancy that so-called virtuous women are often subject to these whirlwinds of folly, desires, and passions, that rage within us in spite of ourselves. Such dreams are not devoid of fascination: they are not

unlike those winter-evening conversations in which you jump at once from your own fireside to China. But what becomes of virtue during those delightful journeys when the mind has surmounted every obstacle? During the first ten months of my seclusion, I led the miserable, solitary life I have described; I went out myself in the morning, unseen, to buy my provisions for the day; I did my chamber-work, I was master and servant in one, I played Diogenes with incredible pride. But, after those ten months, during which the landlady and her daughter kept a sharp eye on my manners and customs, scrutinized my appearance, and discovered my destitution, perhaps because they were very unfortunate themselves, an inevitable intimacy sprang up between us. Pauline, the lovely creature whose artless, budding charms had in some sort led me thither, rendered me several services which it was impossible to refuse. All misfortunes are sisters, they speak the same language and have the same generosity, the generosity of those who, possessing nothing, are lavish of sentiment and give freely of their time and their services. Pauline, by insensible degrees, assumed control of my room and insisted upon waiting on me, and her mother made no objection. I caught the mother herself mending my linen, and she blushed to be surprised at that charitable occupation. Having become their protégé in spite of myself, I accepted their services. In order to understand the relation between us, one must realize the excitement of toil, the tyranny of ideas, and the

instinctive repugnance for the details of material life felt by the man who lives by thought. Could I resist the delicate attention with which Pauline noiselessly brought me my frugal meal, when she noticed that I had eaten nothing for seven or eight hours? With the grace of a woman and the artlessness of a child, she would smile as she made a motion to tell me that I was not expected to see her. She was another Ariel gliding like a sylph through my door, and anticipating my wants. One evening, Pauline told me her story with touching ingenuousness. Her father commanded a squadron in the grenadiers of the Garde Impériale. At the passage of the Beresina he was taken prisoner by the Cossacks; later, when Napoléon proposed an exchange for him, the Russian authorities searched Siberia for him in vain; according to some of the other prisoners, he had escaped with the idea of going to India. Since then, Madame Gaudin, my landlady, had never heard from her husband. Then came the disasters of 1814 and 1815. Alone, without friends or resources, she had decided to let furnished lodgings in order to support her daughter. She still hoped to see her husband again. Her most cruel disappointment was to allow Pauline to grow up without education—her own Pauline, a goddaughter of the Princess Borghese, who would not have done discredit to the fair destiny promised by her imperial patroness. When Madame Gaudin confided to me that bitter grief, which was killing her, and said to me, in a heart-rending tone: 'I would

gladly give the scrap of paper that makes Gaudin a baron of the Empire, and whatever claim we have to the estate of Wistchnau, to know that Pauline would be educated at Saint-Denis!' I started, as the idea suddenly occurred to me to offer to complete Pauline's education in acknowledgment of the attentions the two women had lavished upon me. The innocent candor with which they accepted my offer was equal to the artless feeling that dictated it.

"Thus I had some hours of recreation. The little one had a most excellent disposition; she learned so readily that she soon became a more skilful performer on the piano than I was myself. As she fell into the way of thinking aloud as she sat beside me, she displayed the innumerable attractions of a heart opening to life like the petals of a flower slowly unfolded by the sun; she listened to me attentively and with pleasure, resting upon me her velvety black eyes, which seemed to smile; she repeated her lessons in a soft, caressing tone, manifesting true childish delight when I was satisfied with her. Her mother, more anxious every day at having to protect from all manner of dangers a girl who, as she grew, fulfilled all the promises made by the charms of her childhood, was glad to see her shut herself up all day long to study. As my piano was the only one at her service, she took advantage of my absence to practise on it. When I returned, I would find Pauline in my room in the most modest of costumes; but, at the slightest movement, her supple figure and the charms of her person made

themselves manifest under the coarse stuff. Like the heroine of the tale of *Peau-d'Ane*, she displayed a tiny foot in shabby slippers. But those fascinating treasures, that wealth of girlish charm, all that splendid beauty was wasted upon me. I had laid a command upon myself to see in Pauline only a sister. I should have been horrified at the thought of betraying her mother's confidence; I admired the lovely girl like a picture, like the portrait of a deceased mistress; in short, she was my child, my statue! Another Pygmalion, I wished to make a statue of a living, speaking, sane, and healthy maiden; I was very stern with her, but the more I made her feel the effects of my schoolmaster's despotism, the sweeter and more submissive she became.

"Although I was encouraged in my self-restraint and continence by noble sentiments, nevertheless, pettifogging arguments did not fail to occur to me. I cannot understand how probity in financial matters can exist without probity of thought. To betray a woman and to make a dishonest failure have always seemed identical to me. To love a young woman, or to allow one's self to be loved by her, constitutes a binding contract, the conditions of which should be thoroughly understood. We are at liberty to abandon the woman who sells herself, but not the girl who gives herself, for she does not know the extent of her sacrifice. I might have married Pauline, and it would have been sheer madness. Would it not have been to devote a sweet, virgin soul to

ghastly misery? My poverty spoke out in its selfish language, and constantly interposed its iron hand between that sweet creature and myself. And then—I confess it to my shame—I cannot conceive of love in poverty. Perhaps there are the seeds of depravity in me, chargeable to the disease of mankind which we call civilization; but a woman, were she as attractive as the fair Helen, or Homer's Galatea, has no sort of influence on my senses if she is in the least degree untidy. Ah! *vive l'amour* in silk and cashmere, surrounded by the marvels of luxury that become it so wonderfully well, perhaps because it is itself a luxury. I like to crumple dainty toilets beneath my desires, to crush flowers, to lift a sacrilegious hand against the elegant structure of a perfumed head-dress. Ardent eyes, concealed by a veil of lace which their glances pierce as the flame rends the smoke of the cannon, have a strange attraction for me. My love delights in silken ladders scaled noiselessly on a winter's night. What bliss to arrive, covered with snow, in a room lighted with perfumed tapers, hung with painted silks, and to find there a woman who is herself swathed in snow—for what other name can one give to the veils of seductive muslin, through which her figure is vaguely outlined like an angel in its cloud, and which she will soon throw aside? Then, too, I must have timid happiness, insolent security. In a word, I long to see once more that mysterious woman, of dazzling beauty, a queen in society, but virtuous, surrounded by respectful homage, clad in lace, gleaming with

diamonds, holding sway over the city, and of such high rank and so imposing that no one dares pay court to her. In the midst of her court, she casts a stealthy glance at me, a glance that gives the lie to all those artifices, a glance that sacrifices the world and mankind to me! Certainly, I have called myself a fool a hundred times over for loving a few ells of lace and velvet and fine linen, the achievements of a hair-dresser, wax-candles, a carriage, a title, heraldic coronets painted by artists in stained glass or manufactured by a silversmith—in a word, everything that is most artificial and least womanly in woman; I have made sport of myself, I have argued with myself, but all in vain. An aristocratic woman and her refined smile, the distinction of her manners and her self-respect delight me; when she places a barrier between herself and the world, she flatters all my vanities, which are the half of love. Envied by all about me, my bliss seems to have a sweeter savor. Doing nothing that other women do, walking and living as they do not, enveloping herself in a cloak that they cannot procure, exhaling perfumes peculiar to herself, my mistress seems to me more wholly mine; the more she holds aloof from the earth, even in all that is earthly in love, the more beautiful she is in my eyes. In France, luckily for me, we have been twenty years without a queen,—I should have loved the queen!

"To have the habits of a princess a woman must be rich. In face of my romantic fancies, what was Pauline? Could she sell me nights that shorten life,

a love that kills and puts at stake all the human faculties? We do not often die for poor girls who give themselves to us! I have never been able to banish these ideas, nor these poetic reveries. I was born for impossible love, and chance decreed that I should be served beyond my desires. How many times have I, in fancy, shod Pauline's tiny feet in satin, confined her form, slender and graceful as a young poplar, in a robe of gauze, thrown over her bosom a light scarf, and escorted her across the richly carpeted floors of her palace to a magnificent carriage! I could have adored her so. I attributed to her a pride that she had not, I stripped her of all her virtues, her innate charms, her ingenuous smile, to plunge her into the Styx of vice and make her heart invulnerable, to anoint her with our crimes, to make her the ridiculous puppet of our salons, a delicate creature who goes to bed in the morning and is born again at night by the dawn of candle-light. Pauline was all sentiment, all freshness, I would have made her cold and hard. In these last days of my folly, memory has brought Pauline before me as it paints the scenes of our childhood. More than once I have been deeply moved at the recollection of delightful moments. I would see the lovely child sewing beside my table placid, silent, deep in thought, her face dimly lighted by the feeble rays which shone in at my garret windows and played in silvery waves upon her lovely black hair; or I would hear her rippling laugh, or her rich voice singing the pretty airs she composed without effort. Often my

Pauline became excited over her music, and at such times her face bore a striking resemblance to the noble face by which Carlo Dolci sought to represent Italy. My pitiless memory threw that maiden at me through the excesses of my life, like a living remorse, an image of virtue! But let us leave the poor child to her destiny! However unfortunate she may be, at all events I placed her out of reach of a horrible tempest by refraining from dragging her into my hell.

"Until last winter my life was the tranquil, studious life of which I have tried to give you a feeble picture. In the early days of December, 1829, I met Rastignac, who, notwithstanding the deplorable condition of my clothes, took my arm and asked about my circumstances with truly fraternal interest. Caught in the snare of his manner, I described in a few words my life and my hopes; he began to laugh, and treated me as a man of genius and a fool combined. His Gascon accent, his experience of the world, his opulence, due to his clever management, had an irresistible effect upon me. Rastignac described my death at the hospital, despised as an idiot, took me to my own funeral, and buried me in the pauper's ditch. He talked about charlatanism. With the agreeable enthusiasm which makes him so fascinating, he declared that all men of genius are charlatans. He asserted that I must have one sense too few,—in itself a cause of death,—if I continued to live alone on Rue des Cordiers. According to him, I ought to go into society, accustom people to

the sound of my name, and lay aside the humble *monsieur*, which ill became a great man in his lifetime.

"'Imbeciles,' he cried, 'call that mode of life *scheming*, moral folk put it under the ban by the phrase *dissipated life;* let us not bother with men, but look at the results. You are at work, you say? very good, you will never be anything! I am fitted for everything and good for nothing, lazy as a lobster, eh? very good, I shall succeed in everything. I go everywhere, I push forward, people make room for me; I boast, they believe me; I incur debts, other people pay them! Dissipation, my dear man, is a political system. The life of a man who is busily running through his fortune often becomes a speculation; he invests his capital in friends, in pleasures, in patrons, in acquaintances. Suppose a merchant has a million at risk; for twenty years he doesn't sleep, he neither drinks nor enjoys himself in any way; he broods over his million, he trots it all over Europe; he is bored to death, he is the prey of all the devils man ever invented; then comes liquidation and—I have seen many such cases—often leaves him penniless, friendless, nameless. Whereas the rake amuses himself by living hard, by running his horses. If he happens to lose his capital, he has a chance of being appointed receiver-general, of making a good marriage, of being attached to the service of a minister or an ambassador. He still has friends, a reputation, and is never without money. Knowing the springs by which the world moves, he works

them for his own benefit. Is that a logical system, or am I only a fool? Isn't that the moral of the comedy that is being played in society every day?—Your work is finished,' he continued, after a pause, 'you have a tremendous amount of talent! Very good, you are just coming to the point from which I started. Now you must look out for your own success, that is the surest way. You must form alliances with the coteries and with the men who do the talking. For my part, I propose to have half the credit of your renown, I will be the jeweller who has set the diamonds of your crown. To begin with, come here to-morrow evening. I will take you to a house where all Paris goes, our Paris, the Paris of the dandies, the millionaires, the celebrities, in a word, the men who talk of gold like Chrysostom. When those people have taken up a book, the book becomes the fashion; if it is really good, they have conferred a patent of genius without knowing it. If you have wit, my dear child, you will make the fortune of your *Theory* yourself by acquiring a fuller comprehension of the theory of fortune. To-morrow night you shall see the fair Comtesse Fœdora, the reigning queen.'

"'I have never heard of her.'

"'You're a regular Kaffir,' rejoined Rastignac, with a laugh. 'Not know Fœdora! A single woman with nearly eighty thousand francs a year, who won't have anybody, or whom nobody will have! A sort of female riddle, a half-Russian Parisian, a half-Parisian Russian! A woman in whose salon all

the romantic productions that never appear are edited, the loveliest and most charming woman in Paris! You're not even a Kaffir, you're the intermediate link between a Kaffir and the animal kingdom.—Farewell, until to-morrow.'

"He turned on his heel and disappeared, without awaiting my reply, refusing to admit the possibility that any man in his senses could decline to be presented to Fœdora.

"How can you explain the fascination of a name? *Fœdora* haunted me like an evil thought with which one tries to effect a compromise. A voice said to me: 'You will go to Fœdora's house!' In vain did I dispute with the voice and cry out that it lied—it crushed all my arguments with that name: Fœdora. But were not that name, that woman, the symbol of all my longings, the theme of my life? The name awoke the artificial fascinations of society, caused the fêtes of the Parisian world and the tinsel of vanity to glitter before my eyes. The woman appeared to me encompassed by all the problems of passion over which I had brooded. Perhaps it was, in reality, neither the woman nor the name, but all my vices which stood erect in my mind to tempt me anew. The Comtesse Fœdora, rich and without a lover, resisting the seductions of Paris, was the incarnation of my hopes and my visions. I created a woman in my own guise, I pictured her in my thoughts, I dreamed of her. During the night, I did not sleep, I became her lover, I crowded into a few short hours a whole life, a life of love, and I revelled

in its teeming, devouring joys. The next day, feeling that I could not endure the torture of waiting until evening without occupation, I went out and hired a novel and passed the day reading it, thus making it impossible to think about time or to measure it. While I was reading, the name of Fœdora echoed within me like a sound that one hears afar off, that does not annoy you, but makes you listen.

"Luckily, I still owned a black coat and white waistcoat of decent appearance; and of all my fortune there still remained about thirty francs, which I had scattered about among my clothes and in my drawers, in order to place between a five-franc piece and the gratification of my whims the vexatious barrier of a search and the chance of having to circumnavigate my room. When I had finished dressing, I pursued my treasure through a whole ocean of paper. The paucity of my resources will give you some idea of the inroad that my gloves and a cab made upon my hoard; they consumed a month's supply of bread. Alas! we never lack money for our caprices, we only haggle over the price of useful or necessary things. We toss gold recklessly to ballet-dancers, and we beat down a workman whose hungry family awaits the payment of a bill. How many men have a coat that cost a hundred francs, a diamond in the handle of their cane, and dine for twenty-five sous! It seems as if we could never pay dearly enough for the gratification of vanity.

"Rastignac kept his appointment punctually; he smiled at my metamorphosis and joked me about it;

but when we were on our way to the countess's, he gave me some charitable advice concerning my manner of conducting myself with her; he described her to me as covetous, vain, and suspicious; but covetous with ostentation, vain with simplicity, suspicious with good humor.

"'You know my situation,' he said, 'and how much I should lose by changing mistresses. My observation of Fœdora has been entirely disinterested, without passion, and my conclusions should be just. When it occurred to me to present you to her, I was thinking of your fortune; so be careful what you say to her, for she has a cruel memory, she is adroit enough to drive a diplomatist to despair and she would know by intuition when he was telling the truth; between ourselves I believe that her marriage is not recognized by the Emperor, for the Russian ambassador began to laugh when I mentioned her to him. He doesn't receive her, and bows very coolly when he meets her in the Bois. Nevertheless, she is in Madame de Sérizy's set, and is on visiting terms with Mesdames de Nucingen and de Restaud. In France her reputation is intact; the Duchesse de Carigliano, the most straitlaced dowager in all the Bonapartist clique, often passes the summer with her on her country estate. Many young dandies, including the son of a peer of France, have offered her a name in exchange for her fortune; she has courteously shown them all the door. Perhaps she is susceptible to nothing lower than the title of count! Aren't you a marquis? go ahead, if

you are pleased with her! That's what I call giving instructions.'

"Rastignac's jesting tone made me think that he intended to pique my curiosity, so that my extemporaneous passion had reached its climax when we stopped in front of a peristyle decorated with flowers. As we ascended a broad carpeted stairway, where I observed all the refinements of English comfort, my heart beat fast; I blushed, I belied my birth, my feelings, my pride, I was absurdly bourgeois. Alas! I had come from a garret, after three years of poverty, unable even then to estimate above the trifles of life those acquired treasures, that vast intellectual capital which enriches you in a moment when power falls into your hands without crushing you, because study has trained you in advance for political conflicts. I noticed a woman of about twenty-two years, of medium height, dressed in white, surrounded by a circle of men, and holding a feather screen in her hand. As she caught sight of Rastignac, she rose, came toward us, smiled pleasantly, and in a melodious voice made a complimentary speech to me, evidently prepared beforehand: our friend had spoken of me as a man of talent, and his adroitness, his emphatic Gascon manner, procured for me a flattering reception.

"I was the object of an especial attention which embarrassed me; but Rastignac luckily had spoken of my modesty. I met there scholars, men of letters, ex-ministers, peers of France. The conversation resumed its course some little time after my arrival,

and, feeling that I had a reputation to sustain, I summoned courage; without abusing the privilege of speaking when it was accorded me, I tried to sum up the discussions by remarks of more or less incisiveness, profundity, and wit. I produced some effect. For the thousandth time in his life Rastignac was a true prophet. When there were enough people there for everyone to be at liberty to follow his own inclination, my sponsor took my arm and we walked through the rooms.

"'Don't seem to be too much overcome by the princess,' he said, 'or she will divine the object of your visit.'

"The salons were furnished in exquisite taste. I saw some very choice pictures there. Each room had its own individuality, as in the houses of the wealthiest Englishmen, and the silk hangings, the ornaments, the shape of the furniture, the decorations, to the smallest detail, were all in harmony with a definite scheme. In a Gothic boudoir, where the doors were hidden by tapestry curtains, the framing of the material, the clock, the designs in the carpet, were all Gothic; the ceiling, formed of dark, carved beams, presented to the eye a series of panels instinct with grace and originality of design; the wainscoting was artistically carved; there was nothing to mar the effect of that attractive scheme of decoration, not even the windows, the panes being of stained glass and very valuable. I was surprised by the appearance of a small modern salon, in which some artist, I know not who, had

exhausted the resources of our style of decoration, so airy and fresh, so soft to the eye, without garish brilliancy and modest in the matter of gilding. It was as sensuous and vague as a German ballad, a genuine retreat hewn out for an 1827 passion, perfumed by jardinières filled with rare flowers. Beyond that salon and adjoining it, I discovered a gilded apartment, in the style of the age of Louis XIV., which presented a striking but agreeable contrast to our present system of decoration.

"'You will be in comfortable quarters here,' said Rastignac, with a smile in which there was a slight suggestion of sarcasm. 'Isn't it fascinating?' he added, taking a seat.

"Suddenly he rose, took my hand, led me into the bedroom, and showed me, beneath a canopy of white muslin and moire, a sumptuous bed, lighted by the soft rays of a lamp—the bed of a young fairy betrothed to a genie.

"'Isn't it immodest, audacious, coquettish beyond measure, to allow us to gaze upon that throne of love?' he exclaimed in a low tone. 'To give one's self to no one, and yet to allow every one to leave his card here. If I were free, I would see that woman humbled and weeping at my door —'

"'Are you so sure of her virtue?'

"'The most audacious of our masters, aye and the most adroit, confess that they have failed with her, they are still fond of her and are her devoted friends. Isn't the woman an enigma?'

"His words stirred me to a sort of drunken frenzy,

my jealousy already feared the past. Leaping for joy, I returned hurriedly toward the salon where I had left the countess, and met her in the Gothic boudoir. She stopped me with a smile, led me to a seat by her side, questioned me about my work, and seemed deeply interested in it, especially when I sketched my theory to her in a jesting way, instead of resorting to technical terms and developing it scientifically. She seemed much amused to learn that the human will was a material force resembling steam; that nothing in the moral world could resist that power when a man accustomed himself to concentrate it, to exert it as a whole, to direct constantly upon the minds of others the full stream of that fluid mass; that such a man could modify everything connected with human life, even the laws of nature, at his will. Fœdora's objections revealed a certain keenness of mind; I amused myself by yielding to them for a few moments to flatter her, then shattered her woman's arguments by a word, calling her attention to a single incident in everyday life, sleep, apparently a commonplace thing, but in reality full of insoluble problems for the student, and I stimulated her curiosity. Indeed, she was perfectly silent for a moment when I told her that our ideas were organized beings, complete in every respect, which lived in an invisible world and exerted an influence over our destinies, citing to her as proofs the thoughts of Descartes, Diderot, Napoléon, which had guided, which were still guiding, a whole age.

"I had the honor of amusing her; when she left me, she invited me to call upon her: in court jargon she gave me the *grandes entrées*.

"Whether, after my praiseworthy custom, I mistook the formulas of good-breeding for words from the heart, or whether Fœdora saw in me a future celebrity and was desirous of increasing her menagerie of *savants*, certain it is that I believed that I had made an impression upon her. I summoned all my physiological knowledge and my previous studies of woman to assist me to scrutinize that strange creature and her conduct throughout that evening; concealed in a window-recess, I sought to divine her thoughts, looking for evidences of them to her bearing, studying the manœuvres of a hostess who goes and comes, sits down and talks, beckons to a man, questions him, and leans against the door-jamb to listen to his reply; I detected such a gentle, languid motion in her gait, such graceful undulations of her dress, she aroused desire so irresistibly, that I became very sceptical concerning her virtue. If Fœdora looked slightingly upon love to-day, she must once have been very passionate; for experience in affairs of the heart was betrayed even in the attitude she assumed before her interlocutor; she leaned against the woodwork with a coquettish air, like a woman ready to fall, but also ready to fly if a too ardent glance should alarm her. With her arms loosely folded, seeming to breathe in the words addressed to her, listening to them with her glance, so to speak, and with kindly interest, she exhaled

an atmosphere of sentiment. Her bright red lips stood out against a complexion of dazzling whiteness. Her dark hair set off to advantage the orange tinge of her eyes, which were veined like Florentine marble, and whose expression seemed to add meaning to her words. Her bust, too, possessed a most attractive grace. A rival might, perhaps, have accused of harshness the heavy eyebrows that seemed to meet, and have criticised the almost imperceptible down that adorned the outline of her face. To my mind passion was stamped upon every detail. Love was written upon her Italian eyelids, upon her lovely shoulders worthy of the Venus of Milo, upon her features, upon her lower lip, which was slightly heavy and shadowed. She was more than a woman, she was a romance. Yes, that wealth of feminine charms, that harmonious combination of outlines, the promises that that noble form seemed to make to passion, were tempered by a never-failing reserve, by an extraordinary modesty, which contrasted strongly with the expression of her whole person. Powers of observation as keen as mine were needed to detect in that nature the signs of a destiny of pleasure. To explain my thought more clearly: there were two women in Fœdora, separated, perhaps, by the waist: one was unemotional and cold, the head alone seemed amorous; before allowing her eyes to rest upon a man, she prepared her glance, as if something mysterious and indescribable were taking place within her; you would have said that there was a convulsion in her sparkling

eyes. In short, either my knowledge was incomplete, and I still had many secrets to fathom in the moral world, or the countess possessed a lovely soul, whose sentiments and outgivings imparted to her face the charm that overpowers and fascinates us,—an influence that is wholly moral and the more potent in that it is in accord with the sympathies of desire.

"I left the house, enchanted, seduced by that woman, intoxicated by her luxurious surroundings, with every noble and vicious, good and evil fibre in my heart fairly on edge. Finding myself so excited, so keenly alive, so deeply moved, I thought that I could understand the attraction that led thither those artists and diplomats and men in power, those money-changers, lined, like their strong-boxes, with sheet-iron: doubtless they went there to experience in her presence the same delirious excitement that caused every chord of my being to vibrate, lashed my blood to frenzy even in the tiniest vein, drew tense the smallest nerve and throbbed in my brain! She had yielded to none in order to keep them all. A woman is a flirt so long as she does not love.

"'And then,' I said to Rastignac, 'she may have been married or sold to some old man, and the memory of her first marriage gives her a horror of love.'

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"I returned on foot from Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where Fœdora lived. Almost the whole of Paris lies between her mansion and Rue des Cordiers; but it seemed a short distance to me, although it was very cold. To undertake the conquest of Fœdora in winter, a hard winter too, when I had only thirty francs in my possession and when the distance between us was so great! Only a poor young man can realize what a passion costs in carriages, gloves, coats, linen, etc. If love tarries a little too long at the platonic stage, it becomes ruinous. Really there are Lauzuns in the School of Law, for whom it is an utter impossibility to aspire to a passion living on a first floor. And how could I, poor, weak, helpless I, simply dressed, pale and haggard as an artist convalescing from a great work—how could I contend with well-curled, pretty, sportive youths, cravated in a way to drive all Croatia to despair, wealthy, equipped with tilburys, and clad in impertinence?

"'Bah! Fœdora or death!' I cried, as I crossed a bridge. 'Fœdora is fortune!'

"The lovely Gothic boudoir and the Louis XIV. salon passed before my eyes, I saw the countess once more, with her white dress, her ample, graceful sleeves, her seductive gait and her tempting waist. When I reached my cold, bare garret, untidy as a naturalist's wig, I was still encompassed

by visions of Fœdora's luxurious apartments. The contrast was an evil counsellor, crimes must have such a genesis. Trembling with rage, I cursed my respectable, honorable poverty, my fertile garret where so many thoughts had germinated. I called God, the devil, the condition of society, my father, the whole universe, to account for my wretched destiny, my misery; I went to bed half-starved, mumbling absurd imprecations, but thoroughly resolved to seduce Fœdora. That woman's heart was a last lottery ticket upon which my fortune depended.

"I will spare you a description of my first visits to Fœdora, in order to come at once to the main scene of the drama. While trying to appeal to her heart, I tried also to make a conquest of her mind, to have her vanity on my side; in order to make sure that she would love me, I gave her a thousand reasons for loving herself more dearly; I never left her in an indifferent frame of mind; women will have excitement at any price, and I lavished it upon her; I would have preferred to have her angry with me rather than indifferent to me. Although at first actuated by a firm determination and by the desire to win her love, I gained some little ascendency over her, my passion soon increased beyond measure, I lost control of myself, I gave way to genuine emotion, I lost my head and fell madly in love with her. I have no very clear idea of what we call *love* in poetry or in conversation; but the sentiment that suddenly developed in my twofold nature I have never found described anywhere, either in the rhetorical,

stilted sentences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose very lodgings I was occupying for aught I knew, or in the frigid conceptions of our two literary epochs, or in Italian pictures. The first view of the Lake of Brienne, some airs of Rossini, the *Madonna* by Murillo, owned by Maréchal Soult, La Lescombat's letters, certain phrases scattered through collections of anecdotes, but, above all, the prayers of fanatics and some passages from our *fabliaux*, are the only things that have ever succeeded in carrying me back to the divine regions of my first love. Nothing in any human language, no translation of human thought with the assistance of pictures, statues, words, or sounds, could ever reproduce the nervous force, the genuineness, the completeness, the suddenness, of sentiment in the soul! Yes, he who calls it art, lies. Love passes through an infinity of transformations before blending forever with our life and imparting to it forever its flaming tints. The secret of that imperceptible infiltration escapes the artist's analysis. True passion is expressed by cries, by sighs that annoy a man of cold temperament. One must needs love sincerely to sympathize with the bellowing of Lovelace in *Clarissa Harlowe*. Love is an unsullied brook, springing from its water-cress and flowers and bright gravel, which, as it becomes a river, a mighty stream, changes its nature and appearance with every wave, and empties into an immeasurable ocean, where imperfect minds see only monotony, where great minds are plunged in never-ending contemplation. How can one venture to describe those

transitory flashes of sentiment, those nothings which are valued so highly, those words whose intonation exhausts the treasures of the language, those glances more full of meaning than the noblest poems? In each of the mysterious scenes in which we insensibly become enamored of a woman, a yawning abyss opens to swallow up all human poetry. Ah! how can we hope to reproduce by explanatory notes the fervid, mysterious agitations of the soul, when we lack words to describe the visible mysteries of beauty? What fascination!

"How many hours have I sat, lost in ineffable bliss, simply *looking at her!* Happy, but why? I cannot say. At such times, if her face was in the bright light, a sort of phenomenon took place that made her fairly resplendent; the imperceptible down that gives a golden tinge to her smooth, delicate skin softly marked the outlines of her face with the charm we admire in the far-off horizon lines when they fade away in the sunlight. The sunlight seemed to caress her, blending with her, so to speak, and it was as if a light brighter than the very sunlight shone from her beaming face; and then a shadow would pass over that sweet face, so coloring it that its expression varied with the varying tints. It often happened that a thought seemed to be written on her marble brow; her eye seemed to blush, her eyelids trembled, her features moved nervously with a dawning smile; the eloquent coral of her lips grew brighter, they parted and then closed again; the reflection of her hair cast mysterious dark shadows upon her

smooth temples; with every change of expression it was as if she had spoken. Each phase of her beauty feasted my eyes anew, revealed unsuspected charms to my heart. I tried to read a sentiment, a hope, in all the variations of her face. Those unspoken words passed from heart to heart, as sound travels in its echo, and filled my soul with fleeting joys which made a profound impression upon me. Her voice caused me a thrill of ecstasy which I could hardly restrain. Like some Lorraine prince whom I cannot now recall, I could have held a red-hot coal in the hollow of my hand without feeling it, while she passed her alluring fingers through my hair. It was no longer simple admiration, desire, but a magic spell, fatality. Often, when I had returned to my own room, I saw Fœdora indistinctly in her boudoir, and vaguely entered into her life; if she was indisposed, I suffered too, and I would say to her the next day:

"'You have been ill!'

"How many times did she appear before me in the silent watches of the night, evoked by the power of my frenzied imagination! Sometimes, as suddenly as a flash of light, she would snatch my pen from my hand and frighten away learning and study, which took flight in dismay; she would compel my admiration, resuming the beguiling attitude in which I had last seen her. Sometimes, I would myself go to meet her in the world of phantoms and salute her as a hope, begging her to let me hear her silvery voice; then I would wake, weeping. One day, after

she had promised to go to the theatre with me, she abruptly and capriciously refused to leave the house and begged me to leave her alone. In despair at a disappointment which cost me a day's work and—shall I say it?—my last crown, I went to the place to which she was to have gone with me, wishing to see the play she had expressed a wish to see. I had hardly taken my seat when I received an electric shock in the heart. A voice said to me: 'She is here!' I turned and saw the countess sitting in the shadow at the rear of her box, on the lower tier. My glance did not waver, my eyes sought her out at once with supernatural keenness of vision, my heart flew out toward her as a bee flies to its flower. By what means had my senses been advised of her presence? Such internal sensations do make themselves felt and may well surprise superficial people, but these manifestations of our inward nature are as simple as the ordinary phenomena of our external vision; so that I was not astonished but angry. My studies concerning our moral power, of which so little is known, served at least to enable me to discover some living proofs of my theory in my passion. That alliance of the scholar and the lover, of a love for science and a genuine idolatry, was a most extraordinary thing. The scholar was often satisfied with what drove the lover to despair, and when he thought that his triumph was secure, the lover gleefully turned science out of-doors.

"Fœdora saw me and became grave,—my presence embarrassed her. At the first entr'acte, I

went to pay her a visit; she was alone and I remained. Although we had never spoken of love, I foresaw an impending explanation. I had never told her my secret, and yet we lived in a sort of suspense; she confided her plans for her amusement to me, and she would ask me at night, with an air of friendly concern, if I would come the next day; she would glance at me when she made a bright remark, as if her sole wish was to please me; if I sulked, she became affectionate; if she pretended to be out of temper, I had the privilege of questioning her, so to speak; if I committed an indiscretion, she would make me beg a long while before forgiving me. These quarrels, which we had come to enjoy, were overflowing with love. She displayed so much coquettish charm and I found so much pleasure in them! At that moment, our intimacy was altogether suspended, and we acted as strangers to each other. The countess's manner was frigid; for my part, I apprehended disaster.

"'You must take me home,' she said, when the play was at an end.

"The weather had suddenly changed. When we left the theatre, a mixture of rain and snow was falling. Fœdora's carriage could not reach the door of the theatre. Seeing a well-dressed woman walking along the boulevard, a porter held his umbrella over our heads, and demanded compensation for his services when we had entered the carriage. I had nothing; I would have given ten years of my life for two sous. All that goes to make up man and his

immeasurable vanity was crushed within me by an infernal pang. The words: 'I have no change, my good man!' were uttered in a harsh tone which seemed to come from my thwarted passion—uttered by me, that man's brother; by me, who knew so well what destitution meant! by me, who had once given away seven hundred thousand francs so readily! The footman pushed the porter aside, and the horses trotted away. On the way home, Fœdora, absorbed in thought or pretending to be, replied to my questions with disdainful monosyllables. I held my peace. It was a ghastly moment. When we reached her house, we sat down in front of the fireplace. When the servant had withdrawn, after kindling the fire, the countess turned to me with an indefinable expression, and said in a solemn tone:

"'Since I returned to France, several young men have been tempted by my fortune; I have received declarations of love which might well have satisfied my pride; I have met men whose attachment was so deep and sincere that they would have married me even if I had been only the poor girl I once was. In short, let me tell you, Monsieur de Valentin, that more wealth and additional titles have been offered me; but let me tell you also that I have never seen again any person who was so ill-advised as to mention love to me. If my affection for you were a mere trivial sentiment, I would not give you a warning dictated by friendship rather than by pride. A woman runs the risk of receiving something very like an affront, when, assuming that a man is in love

with her, she discourages in advance a sentiment that is always flattering. I am familiar with the scenes of Arsinoë and Araminta, so that I have become accustomed to the retorts that I may be forced to hear under such circumstances; but to-day I trust that I may not be misjudged by a man of superior mind for having frankly laid my heart bare to him.'

"She expressed herself with the *sang-froid* of a solicitor or a notary explaining to a client the progress of a lawsuit or the provisions of a contract. The clear, fascinating tone of her voice did not betray the slightest emotion; but her face and bearing, always noble and dignified, seemed to me to have become diplomatically cold and stern. Doubtless she had prepared her speech and arranged the programme of that scene. Oh! my dear friend, when some women take pleasure in tearing our hearts, when they have made up their minds to plunge in a dagger up to the hilt and twist it in the wound, then they are truly adorable, for they love or wish to be loved! Some day they will reward us for our sufferings, as God, we are told, will reward our good deeds; they will repay us a hundred-fold in pleasure the pain whose violence they fully appreciate: is not their unkindness heavily charged with passion? But is it not the most cruel agony to be tortured by a woman who slaughters us with indifference? At that moment, Fœdora unconsciously trampled upon all my hopes, shattered my life, and ruined my future with the cold heedlessness and innocent cruelty of a child who, from mere curiosity, tears off the wings of a butterfly.

"'Sooner or later,' added Fœdora, 'you will realize, I trust, the sincerity of the affection I offer my friends. You will find me always kind and devoted to them. I could sacrifice my life for them, but you would despise me if I accepted their love without sharing it. I say no more. You are the only man to whom I have ever said these last words.'

"At first, speech failed me, and I could hardly master the tempest that arose within me; but I soon forced back my emotions to the depths of my heart, and began to smile.

"'If I tell you that I love you,' I began, 'you will banish me; if I accuse myself of indifference to you, you will punish me for it. Priests, magistrates, and women never lay aside their robes entirely. Silence compromises nothing; permit me, madame, to remain silent. In order to have given me this brotherly warning, you must have feared to lose me, and that thought may well content my pride. But let us lay aside personalities. You are, perhaps, the only woman with whom I can discuss, philosophically, a determination so opposed to the laws of nature. Compared with other specimens of your kind, you are a phenomenon. So let us, in good faith, join in the search for the cause of this psychological anomaly. Is there in your make-up, as in that of many women who are proud of themselves, in love with their own perfections, a strain of refined egotism which leads you to look with horror upon the thought of belonging to a man; of renouncing your free will, and of being subjected to a merely conventional supremacy

which is repugnant to you? you would seem to me a thousand times more beautiful! Can it be that you have been once maltreated by the tender passion? Perhaps the value that you are justified in placing upon your graceful figure, your delicious waist, causes you to dread the ravages of maternity: would not that be a most convincing secret reason for declining to be loved too well? Have you imperfections which force you to be virtuous whether you will or not? Don't be angry, I am studying, discussing the phenomenon, I am a thousand leagues from passion. Nature, which makes some people blind from birth, may very well create women who are deaf, dumb, and blind in love. Upon my word, you are a most valuable subject for medical observation! You don't know your own value. You may have a most legitimate repugnance for men; I agree with you, they all seem to me ugly and odious. But you are right,' I added, feeling my heart swell within me, 'you do well to despise us; the man doesn't exist who is worthy of you!'

"I will not try to tell you all the sarcastic things I said to her with a smile on my lips. But the most cutting words, the most stinging irony, did not extort a sound or an angry gesture from her. She listened with her habitual smile on her lips and in her eyes, the smile that she put on like an article of clothing, and that was always the same, to her friends, to simple acquaintances, and to strangers.

"'Isn't it good of me to allow myself to be placed on the dissecting-table thus?' she said, taking

advantage of a moment when I was gazing at her in silence. 'You see,' she continued, with a laugh, 'I have no absurd susceptibilities where friendship is concerned. Many women would punish your impertinence by closing their doors to you.'

"'You can banish me from your house without being called upon to explain your harsh treatment.'

"As I said it, I felt that I should kill her if she dismissed me.

"'You are foolish,' she exclaimed, with a smile.

"'Have you ever thought of the effects of a violent passion?' I continued. 'Men driven to despair have often murdered their mistresses.'

"'It is better to be dead than unhappy,' she replied, coldly. 'A man so passionate as that is certain to abandon his wife some day and leave her in the gutter after running through her fortune.'

"That reasoning floored me. I clearly perceived an abyss between that woman and myself. We could never understand each other.

"'Adieu,' I said, coldly.

"'Adieu,' she replied, with a friendly nod of the head. 'Until to-morrow.'

"I looked at her for a moment, flashing full upon her all the love that I renounced. She was standing, and smiled her commonplace smile, the hateful smile of a marble statue, seeming to express love, but cold as ice. Can you imagine, my dear friend, all the tortures that beset me as I returned through the rain and snow, tramping along the slush-covered quays for a league, having lost everything? Oh!

COMTESSE FŒDORA TO RAPHAEL

"When we reached her house, we sat down in front of the fireplace. When the servant had withdrawn, after kindling the fire, the countess turned to me with an indefinable expression, and said in a solemn tone:

"'Since I returned to France, several young men have been tempted by my fortune.'"

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the thought that she did not even think of me as poor, but believed me rich and able to ride in a luxurious carriage like herself! What a crushing disillusionment! It was no longer a question of money, but of my heart's entire fortune. I walked at random, discussing with myself the details of that strange conversation; I went so far astray in my commentaries that I ended by conceiving doubts of the value of words and ideas! And still I loved, I loved that cold creature, whose heart required to be conquered every moment, and who, always regardless of the promises of yesterday, appeared on the morrow in an entirely new guise. As I passed through the wicket of the Institute, a feverish impulse seized upon me. At that moment, I remembered that I had had nothing to eat. I had not a sou. To cap the climax of my misery, the rain was defacing my hat. How was I thenceforth to call upon a woman of fashion and appear in a presentable hat? By dint of extreme care, cursing all the while the absurd, idiotic fashion that requires a man to exhibit the lining of his hat, by keeping it always in his hand, I had thus far succeeded in keeping mine half-respectable. Without being obtrusively new or offensively old, very silky, or worn very smooth, it might pass for the hat of a caretaking man; but its artificial career had reached its last stage, it was wounded, warped, done up, a veritable old rag, a fit representative of its master. For lack of thirty sous, I was bereft of my toilsome elegance. Ah! how many untold sacrifices had I not made for

Fœdora in three months! Often I used the necessary money for a week's bread to go to see her for a moment. To lay aside my work and go hungry was nothing! but to walk across Paris without being spattered, to run to avoid the rain, and to reach her house as spotlessly arrayed as the coxcombs who surrounded her,—ah! that task offered innumerable difficulties to a distraught and amorous poet. My happiness, my love, depended upon a splash of mud on my only white waistcoat! To abandon the idea of seeing her if my clothes were soiled, if I were wet! To lack five sous with which to hire a bootblack to wipe the smallest mud-stain from my boots! My passion was heightened by all these petty, unfamiliar vexations, of immense weight to an irritable man.

"The unfortunate resort to sacrifices that cannot be mentioned to women who live in a sphere of luxury and magnificence; they see the world through a prism which gives a golden tinge to men and things. Optimists from selfishness, cruel because good form requires them to be, such women claim exemption from reflection in the name of their enjoyments, and absolve themselves for their indifference to misfortune by the absorbing excitement of pleasure. To them a sou is never a million, but the million seems to them a sou. If love ought to plead its cause by great sacrifices, it ought also delicately to cover them with a veil, to enshroud them in silence; but, while they give lavishly of fortune and life, while they devote themselves to the object of

their passion, rich men profit by the worldly prejudices which always impart a certain prestige to their amorous follies; so far as they are concerned, silence speaks and the veil is a favor, whereas my horrible poverty doomed me to unspeakable torment, and still I could not say: 'I love!' or 'I die!' Was it devotion, after all! Was I not richly rewarded by the pleasure I felt in sacrificing everything for her? The countess had given an exorbitant value, had imparted excessive enjoyment to the most trivial incidents of my life. Whereas I had formerly been careless in the matter of dress, I now respected my coat like a second edition of myself. Between receiving a wound and a rent in my coat, I would not have hesitated! You should be able, therefore, to realize my plight and to understand the frantic thoughts, the constantly increasing frenzy, which worked upon me as I walked along, and which, it may be, the act of walking made more intense! I had an indefinable thrill of infernal joy at the thought that I had reached the apex of misery. I chose to look upon this last crisis as an omen of good fortune; but the treasures of evil are inexhaustible. The door of my lodging-house was open. Through the heart-shaped openings in the shutter, I saw a light shining into the street. Pauline and her mother were waiting for me and talking. I heard my name, I listened.

"'Raphael is a much better-looking fellow than the student in No. 7!' Pauline was saying. 'His hair is such a pretty color! Don't you notice something

in his voice—I can't describe it, but something that stirs your heart? And then, although his manner is a little proud, he's so kind-hearted, and he has such a distinguished way with him! Oh! he's really very handsome! I am sure that all the women must be mad over him.'

"'You talk as if you were in love with him,' observed Madame Gaudin.

"'Oh! I love him like a brother,' she replied, with a laugh. 'I should be ungrateful, indeed, if I weren't fond of him! Did he not teach me music, drawing, grammar, in fact, everything that I know? You don't pay much attention to my progress, my dear mother; but I am getting along so well that I shall be able to give lessons in a little while, and then we can keep a servant.'

"I turned softly away; and, after making a little noise, I entered the hall to get my lamp, which Pauline insisted upon lighting. The poor child had poured a most soothing balm upon my wounds. Her artless praise of my personal appearance restored my courage to some extent. I needed to believe in myself and to listen to an impartial opinion upon the real worth of my natural advantages. My hopes, thus rekindled, may have cast a reflection on the things I saw. Perhaps, too, I had never as yet examined very seriously the scene so often presented to my eyes by those two women in that room: but on that occasion I admired to the full the attractive picture of that modest interior, reproduced so truthfully by Flemish painters. The mother, sitting at the corner

of the hearth on which the fire was fast dying, was knitting stockings, while a kindly smile wandered over her lips. Pauline was painting screens; her colors, her brushes, scattered over a small table, spoke to the eye with fascinating effect; but, when she left her seat and stood up to light my lamp, its full light fell upon her white face; one must have been bent beneath the yoke of a most intense passion to fail to admire her transparent pink hands, the ideal beauty of her head, and her maidenly attitude. The hour and the silence lent their charm to that industrious scene, that peaceful fireside. Their constant labor, performed with unfailing cheerfulness, bore witness to a pious resignation overflowing with exalted sentiments. There was an indefinable harmony between the persons and their surroundings. At Fœdora's the prevailing luxury was unattractive to the eye; it awoke evil thoughts in me; whereas that humble poverty, that natural kindliness, refreshed my soul. Perhaps I was humiliated in presence of luxury; with those two women, in that dimly-lighted room where life, reduced to its simplest terms, seemed to take refuge in the emotions of the heart, perhaps I became reconciled to myself, finding an opportunity to exert the patronage which man is so anxious to obtain credit for. When I stood beside Pauline, she looked at me with an almost motherly expression, and cried, as with trembling hands she hastily put down the lamp:

"'God! how pale you are!—Why, he is all wet!—Mother will dry your clothes.—Monsieur Raphael,'

she continued, after a brief pause, 'you are very fond of milk: we had some cream this evening; see, would you like a taste?'

"She pounced like a kitten on a china bowl full of milk and handed it to me so eagerly, put it under my nose so prettily, that I hesitated.

"'Would you refuse me?' she said in an altered voice.

"Our two prides understood each other. Pauline seemed to be distressed by her poverty and to reproach me for my reserve. I was deeply moved. That cream was for her breakfast the next day, perhaps, but I accepted. The poor girl tried to conceal her joy, but it sparkled in her eyes.

"'I needed it very badly,' I said, as I sat down.—A thoughtful expression passed over her face.—'Do you remember, Pauline, the passage in which Bossuet describes God as rewarding a glass of water more richly than a victory?'

"'Yes,' she replied.

"And her breast rose and fell like a little bird's in the hands of a child.

"'Well, as we are soon to part,' I added in an unsteady voice, 'allow me to express my gratitude for all that you and your mother have done for me.'

"'Oh! let us not count up,' she said, with a laugh.

"Her laugh concealed an emotion which hurt me.

"'My piano,' I continued, as if I had not heard her, 'is one of Erard's best: accept it. Take it without scruple, I should be at a loss how to take it with me in the journey I expect to take.'

"Enlightened, perhaps, by the melancholy tone in which I spoke, the two women seemed to have grasped my meaning, and looked at me with curiosity mingled with dismay. So the affection that I had sought in the icy regions of fashionable society I found in that poor room, sincere, unpretentious, but fervid and perhaps lasting.

"'You must not worry so much,' said the mother. 'Stay here. My husband is on his way home at this moment,' she continued. 'To-night I read the Gospel of Saint John while Pauline held our key between her fingers and placed in a Bible, and the key turned. That sign means that Gaudin is well and prosperous. Pauline began again for you and the young man in No. 7, but the key turned only for you. We shall all be rich. Gaudin will come home a millionaire; I saw him in a dream on a vessel full of serpents; luckily, the water was rough, that means gold and precious stones from across the sea.'

"Those friendly, meaningless words, like the senseless ballads with which a mother soothes her little one's pain, restored my tranquillity to some extent. The good woman's tone and expression breathed the sweet cordiality that does not drive away grief but allays it, lulls it to sleep, and deadens it. Pauline, more sagacious than her mother, scrutinized me anxiously, her intelligent eyes seemed to guess the secret of my life and my future. I thanked both mother and daughter by an inclination of the head; then I made my escape, fearing that I might show my emotion. When I found myself alone

under the eaves, I went to bed with my unhappiness. My fatal imagination formed a thousand unreasoning plans and suggested impossible determinations. When a man is grovelling in the ruins of his fortune, he may still find some resources there; but I was in utter nothingness. Ah! my dear fellow, we make charges against poverty too freely. Be indulgent to the results of the most powerful of all social dissolvents. Where poverty reigns, neither modesty, crime, virtue, nor wit exists. I was devoid of ideas, without strength, like a young girl on her knees before a tiger. A man without passion and without money is still his own master; but a poor devil who loves belongs to himself no longer, and cannot kill himself. Love gives us a sort of veneration for ourselves, we respect in ourselves another life; it becomes then the most horrible of misfortunes, misfortune buoyed up by hope, a hope that makes us submit to tortures. I fell asleep with the idea of going the next day to reveal Fœdora's strange determination to Rastignac.

"'Aha!' said Rastignac, when I entered his room about nine o'clock in the morning, 'I know what brings you here, you have been dismissed by Fœdora. Some kindly souls, jealous of your influence with the countess, told her you were to be married. God knows what wild performances your rivals have laid at your door, and what slanderous tales have been told about you!'

"'Everything is explained!' I cried.

"I remembered all my impertinent remarks, and

it seemed to me that the countess was sublime. I realized that I was a wretch who had not yet suffered enough, and I saw in her indulgence only the patient charity of love.

"'Let's not go so fast,' said the prudent Gascon. 'Fœdora possesses the penetration that is natural to profoundly selfish women, she may have formed her opinion of you at the time when you still saw nothing in her but her fortune and her luxurious life; notwithstanding your cunning, she must have read your heart. She is so deceitful herself that deception does not readily obtain forgiveness from her. I believe,' he added, 'that I started you on a bad road. Despite her shrewd wit and her manners, she seems to me an imperious creature, like all women whose pleasure all comes through the brain. To her, happiness consists solely in living comfortably and in social enjoyments; sentiment is a part to play; she would make you unhappy and you would be her valet-in-chief—'

"Rastignac spoke to deaf ears. I interrupted him to place before him, with apparent cheerfulness, my financial position.

"'Last night,' he rejoined, 'a streak of bad luck carried away all the money I had at my disposal. Except for that vulgar accident, I would gladly have shared my purse with you. But let us go and breakfast at the cabaret, the oysters may have some good advice to give us.'

"He dressed and ordered his tilbury, whereupon, like a couple of millionaires, we drove to the *Café de*

Paris, with the impertinence of the audacious speculators who live on imaginary capital. That devil of a Gascon confounded me by his ease of manner and his imperturbable *sang-froid*. As we were taking our coffee after a delicious and very well-ordered repast, Rastignac, who was distributing nods to a multitude of young men equally remarkable for their personal attractions and their elegant costumes, said to me, as one of the *dandies* entered:

"'There's the man for you.'

"And he motioned to a gentleman with a stylish cravat, who seemed to be looking for a table to suit him, to come and speak with him.

"'This fellow,' whispered Rastignac in my ear, 'has received a decoration for publishing works he doesn't understand; he is a chemist, historian, novelist, publicist; he owns a fourth or a third or a half in Heaven knows how many plays, and he's as ignorant as Dom Miguel's mule. He's not a man, he's a name, a ticket well known to the public. He takes care never to enter a cabinet over which there is this inscription: "Patrons can do their own writing here." He is cunning enough to trick a whole congress. In two words, he's a mongrel in morals, neither altogether honest nor altogether a rascal. But hush! he has already fought one duel, the world asks nothing more of him, and says: "He's an honorable man."'

"'Well, my good friend, my excellent friend, how is Your Intelligence's health?' said Rastignac, as the new-comer seated himself at the next table.

"'Oh! so-so,—I am overwhelmed with work. I have in my hands all the necessary materials for some very interesting historical memoirs, and I don't know whom to get to write them. It worries me; I must make haste, for memoirs are going out of fashion.'

"'Are they memoirs of our own time, or earlier—about the court—about what?'

"'The Affair of the Necklace.'

"'Isn't it a miracle?' Rastignac asked me, with a laugh.

"Then, turning to the speculator again, he added, indicating me:

"'Monsieur de Valentin is a friend of mine, whom I am glad to introduce to you as one of our future literary celebrities. He once had an aunt who was very well thought of at court, a marchioness, and for two years past he has been working at a royalist history of the Revolution.'

"With that he leaned over and put his mouth to the strange dealer's ear.

"'He's a man of talent,' he said, 'but an idiot, who will put your memoirs together, in his aunt's name, for three hundred francs a volume.'

"'The terms suit me,' replied the other, raising his cravat.—'Come, waiter, my oysters!'

"'Very good, but you'll give me twenty-five louis by way of commission and pay him in advance for one volume,' said Rastignac.

"'No, no. I will only advance a hundred and fifty francs, so that I may be more certain of having my manuscript promptly.'

"Rastignac repeated this business conversation to me in an undertone. Then, without consulting me, he replied:

"'We agree to that. When can we come to see you to arrange the matter?'

"'Well, come to dine here to-morrow evening at seven.'

"We rose. Rastignac tossed some change to the waiter, put the bill in his pocket, and we went out. I was stupefied at the careless indifference with which he had sold the name of my respectable aunt, the Marquise de Montbauron.

"'I would rather start for Brazil and teach the Indians algebra, of which I know absolutely nothing, than sully the name of my family.'

"Rastignac interrupted me with a burst of laughter.

"'What a fool you are! First take the fifty crowns and write the memoirs. When they are finished, of course you will refuse to put your aunt's name to them, you idiot! Madame de Montbauron having died on the scaffold, her paniers, her reputation, her beauty, her cosmetics, her slippers, are worth much more than six hundred francs. If the publisher doesn't choose, then, to pay what your aunt is worth, he'll find some old schemer, or some besmirched countess, to sign the memoirs.'

"'Oh!' I cried, 'why did I leave my virtuous garret? The world has some foul, detestable sides!'

"'Bah!' replied Rastignac, 'now you're talking poetry about a matter of business. You're a child.

Listen: as to the memoirs, the public will pass judgment on them; as to my literary broker, hasn't he spent eight years of his life and paid for his connection with the publishing trade by bitter experience? As you bear an unequal share in the labor of the book with him, won't you have the handsomest share in the proceeds? Twenty-five louis are a much larger sum to you than a thousand francs to him. Certainly you can write historical memoirs, a work of art, if there is such a thing, when Diderot wrote six sermons for three hundred francs.'

"'At all events,' I said to him, with much emotion, 'it is a matter of necessity to me: and so, my dear friend, I owe you my thanks. Twenty-five louis will make me very rich.'

"'Richer than you think,' he replied, with a laugh. 'If Finot gives me a commission for the business, can't you guess that you will get it? Let's go to the Bois de Boulogne,' he said; 'we shall see your countess there, and I'll show you the pretty little widow I think of marrying—a charming creature, an Alsatian, a little inclined to stoutness. She reads Kant, Schiller, and Jean-Paul, and a multitude of hydraulic books. She has a mania for asking me for my opinion of them: I have to look as if I understood all that German twaddle and knew a lot of ballads,—drugs that are forbidden by my doctor. I haven't yet been able to break her of her literary enthusiasm, she weeps oceans when she reads Goethe, and I am obliged to weep a little, too, for policy's sake, for there are fifty thousand francs a

year, my dear fellow, and the prettiest little foot and hand in the world! Ah! if she only didn't say *anche* and *proulier* for *ange* and *brouiller*, she'd be an accomplished woman!'

*

"We saw the countess, magnificently arrayed, in a magnificent equipage. The coquette bowed to us very cordially, honoring me with a smile which seemed to me then divinely sweet and overflowing with love. Ah! I was very happy. I believed that she loved me, I had money and treasures of passion—no more poverty for me! Light of heart, merry, pleased with everything, I voted my friend's mistress charming. The trees, the air, the sky, all nature seemed to repeat Fœdora's smile. On returning from the Champs-Elysées, we paid a visit to Rastignac's hatmaker and tailor. The Affair of the Necklace enabled me to abandon my wretched peace equipment and place myself upon a formidable war-footing. Thenceforth I could fearlessly contest the palm for elegance and good breeding with the young men who swarmed around Fœdora. I returned home; I locked myself in my room, sitting beside the window, apparently calm, but bidding an eternal farewell to my poor garret, living in the future, dramatizing my life, discounting love and its joys. Ah! how tempestuous a man's life may become within the four walls of a garret! The human heart is a fairy, it transforms a wisp of straw into diamonds; beneath its wand enchanted palaces spring up and bloom like wild flowers beneath the warm rays of the sun.—The next day, about noon,

Pauline knocked softly at my door, and brought me—guess what?—a letter from Fœdora. The countess requested me to join her at the Luxembourg and go, from there, to see the Museum and Jardin des Plantes.

"'The messenger is waiting for an answer,' she said, after a moment's silence.

"I hastily scrawled a note of thanks, which Pauline took. I dressed. Just at the moment that I was putting the finishing-touches to my toilet, feeling very well satisfied with myself, a cold shudder ran over me as I said to myself:

"'Has Fœdora gone to the Luxembourg in a carriage or on foot? Will it rain or will it be pleasant? But whether she is driving or walking, one can never be certain of a woman's whims. She won't have any money with her, and she'll want to give a five-franc piece to some little Savoyard because of his picturesque rags.'

"I hadn't a red sou, and should have no money until evening. Ah! in these crises of our youth, how dearly a poet pays for the intellectual powers with which fasting and hard work have endowed him! In an instant a thousand sharp, painful thoughts pricked me like so many spear-points. I looked out at the sky through my window, the weather was very uncertain. In case of accident I might take a carriage for the day; but even so, should I not tremble every moment, in the midst of my happiness, lest I should fail to meet Finot in the evening? I did not feel strong enough to endure such anxiety

in the bosom of my joy. Despite the certainty of finding nothing, I undertook a grand voyage of exploration in my room, I looked everywhere for imaginary coins, even in the depths of my straw pallet, I searched everything, I even went so far as to shake my old boots. Trembling with a nervous fever, I gazed with a haggard eye at my furniture after turning it all topsy-turvy. Perhaps you will appreciate my delirious joy, when, as I opened for the seventh time the drawer of my writing-table, into which I looked with the indolence born of despair, I espied, crouching against one side, cunningly hidden, but clean and bright and shining like a star when it rises, a beautiful, noble five-franc piece! Without a word of reproach for its silence or the cruelty of which it had been guilty in lying thus in hiding, I kissed it as a friend faithful in misfortune, and hailed it with a cry which found an echo. I turned sharply around and saw Pauline, pale as death.

"'I thought that you were ill,' she said, in a trembling voice. 'The messenger'—She paused as if she were stifling.—'But mother paid him,' she added.

"With that she ran away, as childlike and playful as a caprice. Poor little one! I wished that she might be as happy as I. At that moment, it seemed to me that I had in my heart the sum total of earthly pleasure, and I would have liked to restore to the unhappy the share that I thought I had stolen from them. We are almost always right in our presentiments of evil—the countess had sent away her

carriage. Obeying one of the whims which pretty women cannot always explain to themselves, she insisted on going to the Jardin des Plantes by the boulevards and on foot.

"'But it is going to rain,' I said.

"She took pleasure in contradicting me. By a mere chance it was pleasant all the time that we were walking through the Luxembourg. When we left the garden, we took a cab, as some drops of rain had already fallen from a dark cloud, whose rapid progress aroused my anxiety. When we reached the boulevards, the rain ceased, the sky became clear. On arriving at the Museum, I wanted to dismiss the cab; Fœdora begged me to keep it. What torture! But to talk with her, repressing the secret ecstasy that doubtless was reflected on my features in a fixed, idiotic smile; to wander through the paths and shrubberies of the Jardin des Plantes and feel her arm in mine—there was something indefinably strange about it all; it was a dream in broad daylight. And yet there was nothing tender, nothing suggestive of love about her movements, whether we were walking or standing still, despite their apparent freedom. When I tried to associate myself, so to speak, with the current of her life, I encountered a peculiar, secret opposition in her, an indefinable suggestion of abruptness or eccentricity. Heartless women have nothing mellow in their gestures. So it happened that we were not united by a single desire, that we did not even walk in unison. There are no words to describe this material discord

between two human beings, for we are not, as yet, accustomed to detect thoughts in movements. This phenomenon of our nature is instinctively felt; it cannot be described.

"During those violent paroxysms of my passion," continued Raphael, after a moment's pause, as if he were meeting some objection he had himself raised, "I did not dissect my sensations, analyze my pleasures, nor count the beatings of my heart, as a miser examines and weighs his gold pieces. Oh, no! to-day experience sheds its sad light over past events, and memory brings back these images to me, as on a lovely day the waves cast up the remains of a shipwreck bit by bit upon the shore.

"'You can do me a very considerable service,' said the countess, glancing at me with an embarrassed air. 'After confiding to you my antipathy for love, I feel the more free to call upon you for your good offices in the name of friendship. Will you not be entitled to much more credit for obliging me to-day?' she added, with a laugh.

"I looked at her in distress. As she felt no emotion in my presence, she was wheedling and not affectionate; she seemed to me to be playing a part like a consummate actress; then, suddenly her accent, a glance, a word, reawakened my hopes; but if my love, kindled to new life, gleamed from my eyes, she endured its dazzling light without a change in the placid expression of her own, which seemed like a tiger's eyes, to be lined with a sheet of metal. At such moments I detested her.

"'The influence of the Duc de Navarreins,' she continued, imparting a most cajoling inflection to her voice, 'would be of great service to me with a very powerful person in Russia, whose intervention is necessary in order that justice may be done me in a matter that concerns my fortune as well as my position in society, the recognition of my marriage by the Emperor. Is not the Duc de Navarreins your cousin? A letter from him would be decisive.'

"'I am your slave,' I replied, 'command me.'

"'You are very kind,' she said, pressing my hand. 'Come to dine with me, and I will tell you everything, as if you were my confessor.'

"And so that woman, that suspicious, secretive creature, whom no one had ever heard mention her own affairs, proposed to consult me!

"'Ah!' I cried, 'how I adore now the silence you imposed upon me! But I should have been glad of some test even more severe.'

"At that moment, she welcomed my frenzied glances and did not refuse my admiration, therefore she loved me! We arrived at her house. Very fortunately, the contents of my purse sufficed to satisfy the driver. I passed the day most blissfully, alone with her, in her house; it was the first time I had been able to see her thus. Until that day, society, her oppressive politeness, and her cold manner had always kept us apart, even during her sumptuous dinners; but now I was treated as if I lived under her roof, I possessed her, so to speak. My wandering imagination broke its fetters, arranged the future to

suit itself, and plunged me in the joys of requited love. Fancying myself her husband, I watched her admiringly as she busied herself with the petty details of housekeeping; I even felt a thrill of delight to see her remove her hat and shawl. She left me alone a moment and returned with her hair rearranged, charming to look upon. That bewitching toilet had been made for me! During the dinner she overwhelmed me with attentions, and displayed an infinity of charm in the thousand and one things which seem to be mere nothings, and yet make up the half of life. When we were seated comfortably side by side in front of a crackling fire, surrounded by the loveliest inventions of oriental luxury; when I saw close beside me that woman whose renowned beauty made so many hearts beat fast, that woman so difficult of conquest, talking to me, lavishing all her coquettish smiles upon me, my luxurious bliss became almost pain. To my undoing, I remembered the important business that I had to arrange, and I attempted to keep the appointment I had made the day before.

"'What! already?' she said, when she saw me take my hat.

"She loved me! At least I thought so when I heard her utter those two words in a caressing tone. To prolong my ecstasy I would willingly have exchanged two years of my life for every hour she would deign to grant me. My happiness increased in proportion to all the money I was losing! It was midnight when she sent me away. The next day,

however, my heroism cost me much remorse; I feared that I had missed the affair of the memoirs, which was of such vital importance to me: I hurried to Rastignac's apartments, and we went together and surprised the titular author of my future works as he was getting out of bed. Finot read me a little contract in which my aunt was not mentioned, and after it was signed he counted out fifty crowns. We three breakfasted together. When I had paid for my new hat, sixty tickets at thirty sous, and my debts, I had only thirty francs left; but all the difficulties of life were smoothed away for a few days. If I had chosen to follow Rastignac's advice, I might have heaped up treasures by resorting freely to the *English system*. He insisted that I should begin to do business on the credit system and negotiate loans, claiming that the loans would strengthen my credit. According to his theory, the future was the most valuable and most reliable form of capital in the world. Hypothecating my debts thus upon future contingencies, he bestowed my custom on his tailor, an artist who understood *young men* and was expected to leave me in peace until my marriage.

"From that day I broke with the secluded, studious life I had led for three years. I was very assiduous in my attendance upon Fœdora, and strove to outdo externally the impertinent upstarts and club heroes who were to be found in her salon. Believing that I had left poverty behind forever, I recovered my freedom of thought, I crushed my rivals, and was esteemed a most fascinating, dangerous, irresistible

man. Shrewd people said of me, however: 'Such a bright fellow as he is cannot have any passions except in his brain!' They charitably lauded my wit at the expense of my sensibility. 'What a lucky fellow, not to love!' they cried. 'If he were in love, would he be so gay, so full of life?' And yet I was as stupid as any lovelorn fool in Fœdora's presence! Alone with her, I could think of nothing to say, or, if I did speak, I maligned love; I was gay in melancholy fashion, like a courtier seeking to hide a cruel affront. However, I tried to make myself indispensable to her life, her happiness, her vanity; day after day, by her side, I was a slave, a plaything always at her service. After wasting my day thus, I returned home to work all night, sleeping barely two or three hours in the early morning. But, as I was not, like Rastignac, accustomed to the *English system*, I soon found myself without a sou. Thereafter, my dear fellow, a coxcomb without a mistress, fashionable without money, an unacknowledged lover, I resumed my former precarious life of hopeless, utter misery sedulously concealed beneath the deceitful appearance of luxury. I felt my earlier sufferings once more, but less poignantly: I had become accustomed, I presume, to their ghastly crises. It often happened that the cakes and tea, served with such a sparing hand in salons, were my only food during the day. Sometimes the countess's bountiful dinners lasted me two days. I employed all my time, my energies, and my powers of observation in the attempt to penetrate deeper into Fœdora's impenetrable

character. Until then, my opinion had been influenced by hope or despair, I saw in her by turns the most affectionate and the most unfeeling creature of her sex; but those alternations of joy and sorrow became intolerable: I longed to bring the horrible struggle to a close by killing my love. Sinister gleams sometimes shone in upon my mind and afforded me glimpses of a deep abyss between us. The countess justified all my apprehensions; I had never detected tears in her eyes; at the theatre the most affecting scene left her cold and smiling. She reserved all her shrewdness for herself, and did not divine another's happiness or unhappiness. In short, she had fooled me!

"Happy to make a sacrifice for her, I had almost degraded myself in her service by calling on my kinsman the Duc de Navarreins, a selfish man who was ashamed of my poverty and who had treated me too badly not to hate me; he received me, therefore, with the frigid courtesy which makes words and gestures seem insulting; his restless glance aroused my compassion. I was ashamed for him, because of his petty meanness in the midst of such splendor. He talked about considerable losses he had sustained by the fall in the three per cents; thereupon I told him the object of my call. The change in his manner, from glacial coldness to cordiality, sickened me. Can you believe, my friend, that he came to the countess's and trampled on me there! Fœdora exerted her powers of fascination and witchery to the utmost; she captivated him and ignored me entirely in

discussing the mysterious affair, of which I knew absolutely nothing: I had been simply a tool!—She seemed not to see me when my cousin was at her house, she received me with even less pleasure than when I was first introduced to her. One evening she humiliated me before the duke by a wave of the hand and a glance which no words can describe. I went away with tears in my eyes, revolving in my mind innumerable schemes of vengeance, plotting shocking deeds of violence.—I often escorted her to the Bouffons: sitting beside her there, wrapped up in my love, I gazed fixedly at her while I gave myself up to the pleasure of listening to the music, wearing out my soul in the twofold joy of loving and of hearing the impulses of my heart faithfully reproduced by the musician's measures. My passion was in the air, on the stage; it triumphed everywhere, save in my mistress's heart. Then I would take Fœdora's hand, I would study her features and her eyes, craving a blending of our sentiments, one of those unexpected harmonies which, being evoked by music, cause hearts to beat in unison; but her hand was irresponsive and her eyes said nothing. When the fire that was burning in my heart flashed from all my features and struck her face too sharply, she would toss me the mechanical smile, the conventional simper that we see upon the lips of every portrait in the salon. She did not listen to the music. The divine measures of Rossini, Cimarosa, Zingarelli, awoke no sentiment in her mind, translated no poetic passage in her life; her heart was barren.

Fœdora appeared at the theatre like a play within a play. Her opera-glass travelled incessantly from box to box; restless, though outwardly calm, she was the victim of fashion: her box, her bonnet, her carriage, were everything to her. You will often meet persons of colossal appearance, whose hearts are soft and tender in an envelope of bronze; but she concealed a heart of bronze beneath her slender, graceful envelope. My fatal knowledge tore away many veils.

"If good breeding consists in forgetting one's self for others, in being always gentle in word and gesture, in pleasing others by helping them to be content with themselves, then Fœdora, despite her *savoir faire*, had not effaced all traces of her plebeian origin: her self-forgetfulness was assumed; her manners, instead of being natural, had been laboriously acquired; in fact, her courtesy had a flavor of servility. But her honeyed words were a treasured expression of goodwill to her favorites, her studied exaggeration was noble enthusiasm. I alone had studied her grimaces, I had stripped her real nature of the thin bark that was enough for society, and I was no longer the dupe of her monkey tricks; I knew her deceitful mind to its depths. When a boor complimented her or praised her, I was ashamed for her. And I loved her still! I still hoped to melt the ice of her heart beneath the wings of a poet's love. If I could once open her heart to the natural affections of a woman, if I could initiate her in the sublimity of self-sacrifice, then she would be perfect

in my eyes, she would become an angel. I loved like a man, a lover, an artist, when, to obtain her, the essential thing was not to love her at all; a solemn idiot or a cool schemer might, perhaps, have triumphed over her. Vain, artificial as she was, she would doubtless have listened to the language of vanity, would have allowed herself to be involved in the meshes of an intrigue; she might have been ruled by a passionless, frozen-hearted man. Keen pangs pierced my heart to the quick when she artlessly displayed her intense selfishness to me. With a pain at my heart, I thought of her as being alone in the world some day, with no one to whom to put out her hand, meeting no friendly eyes on which to rest her own. One evening I mustered courage to describe to her, in vivid colors, her abandoned, lonely, melancholy old age. At the vision of that terrifying revenge of betrayed nature, she made this odious remark:

"'I shall always be rich, and with money we can always create for ourselves the sentiments that are essential to our well-being.'

"I left her, dumfounded by the logic of that luxurious life, that woman, that social circle, and rebuking myself for being so absurdly enamored of her. I did not love Pauline, the poor girl, and had not the wealthy Fœdora the right to repulse Raphael? Our consciences are infallible judges, when we have not murdered them.—'Fœdora,' cried a sophistical voice within me, 'neither loves nor repels anyone; she is free, but she sold herself once for gold. Lover

or husband, the Russian count possessed her. She will surely have one temptation in her life! Wait for it.' Neither virtuous nor frail, she lived apart from mankind, in a sphere of her own, hell or paradise. That mysterious female, clad in cashmere and richly embroidered stuffs, set in motion in my heart all the human emotions, pride, ambition, love, curiosity.

"A caprice of fashion, or the craving to appear original that haunts us all, had led to a mania for puffing a small theatre on the boulevard. The countess expressed a desire to see the painted face of an actor who had been highly praised by some men of intelligence, and I was accorded the honor of escorting her to the first performance of some wretched farce. The box cost a paltry five francs, but I had not a perfidious sou. Having a half-volume of memoirs still to write, I dared not go to Finot to beg assistance, and Rastignac, my Providence, was out of town. That constant want of money was the bane of my life. Once, as we left the Bouffons in a heavy rain, Fœdora insisted upon my calling a cab, and I could not evade her ostentatious solicitude for my comfort: she would not listen to my excuses, my liking for the rain, or my desire to go to a gambling-house. Neither my embarrassed manner nor my drearily jocose words led her to suspect my indigence. My very eyes blushed, but could she understand a look? A young man's life is subject to strange caprices. During that drive, every revolution of the wheels awoke thoughts that burned my

heart; I tried to remove a plank from the floor of the cab, hoping that I could drop out on the ground; but, encountering insurmountable obstacles, I began to laugh convulsively, then became stupidly calm, dazed, like a man in the pillory. When I reached the lodging-house, Pauline interrupted my first faltering words:

"'If you have no change—?' she said.

"Ah! Rossini's music was nothing compared to those words.—But to return to the Funambules. To obtain the necessary funds to escort the countess, it occurred to me to pawn the gold frame of my mother's portrait. Although I always thought of the Mont-de-Piété as one of the doors to the galleys, it was better to carry my bed there myself than to solicit alms. The expression of the man to whom you apply for money makes you feel so ill! Some loans cost us our honor, just as some refusals pronounced by friendly lips take away our last illusion. Pauline was working, her mother had gone to bed. Casting a furtive glance at the bed, the curtains being slightly raised, I concluded that Madame Gaudin was sound asleep from the appearance of her placid yellow profile on the pillow in the shadow.

"'Something is troubling you?' said Pauline, resting her brush on her work.

"'My dear child, you can do me a great service,' I replied.

"She looked at me with such a joyous expression that I trembled.

"'Can it be that she loves me?' I thought.—

'Pauline,' I said, aloud. And I sat down beside her, in order to study her closely. She divined my purpose, I spoke in such a questioning tone; she lowered her eyes and I scrutinized her, believing that I could read her heart as plainly as my own, her face was so candid and ingenuous!

"'Do you love me?' I asked her.

"'A little—passionately—not at all!' she cried.

"She did not love me. Her mocking accent and the mischievous gesture that escaped her indicated nothing more than the gratitude of a young madcap. So I confided my poverty and my embarrassment to her, and begged her to assist me.

"'What, Monsieur Raphael,' she said, 'you don't want to go to the Mont-de-Piété yourself, so you send me!'

"I blushed, abashed by a child's logic. Thereupon she took my hand, as if she would atone by a caress for the truth of her exclamation.

"'Oh! I would go,' she said, 'but it isn't necessary. This morning I found two five-franc pieces behind the piano; they had slipped in between the case and the wall without your knowing it; I put them on your table.'

"'You will receive some money very soon, Monsieur Raphael,' said her worthy mother, showing her face between the curtains; 'I can just as well lend you a few crowns meanwhile.'

"'O Pauline,' I cried, wringing her hand, 'if I were only rich!'

"'Pshaw! why?' she said, mischievously.

"Her hand trembled in mine and answered every pulsation of my heart; she hastily withdrew her fingers, looking closely at mine.

"'You will marry a rich woman,' she said, 'but she will cause you much sorrow. *Mon Dieu!* she will kill you! I am sure of it!'

"Her excited words seemed to indicate more or less belief in her mother's superstitions.

"'You are very credulous, Pauline!'

"'Oh! the woman you love will kill you beyond any question!' she said, gazing at me in alarm.

"She took up her brush, dipped it in the paint, betraying deep emotion, and did not look at me again. At that moment, I would have liked right well to believe in chimeras. A man is not altogether miserable when he is superstitious. A superstition is often a hope. When I entered my room, I did, in fact, find two resplendent five-franc pieces there, whose presence was inexplicable. Amid the confused thoughts that fill one's brain as sleep approaches, I tried to reckon up my expenses and account for that unhoped-for treasure, but I fell asleep, lost in fruitless calculations. The next morning, Pauline came to me just as I was starting out to hire a box.

"'Ten francs may not be enough for you,' said the dear, good girl, blushing, 'and my mother sent me to offer you this. Take it, take it!'

"She placed fifteen francs on my table and tried to run away, but I detained her. Admiration dried the tears in which my eyes were swimming.

"'Pauline,' I said, 'you are an angel! The loan itself touches me much less keenly than the modesty of feeling with which you offer it. I used to long for a rich, fashionable, titled wife; now, alas! I would like to possess millions and to meet a young girl, poor like you and with a noble heart like yours; I would renounce a deadly passion that will kill me. Perhaps you will prove to be right.'

"'Enough!' said she.

"She made her escape, and the fresh trills of her nightingale's voice echoed on the staircase.

"'She is very fortunate not to be in love yet!' I said to myself, thinking of the tortures I had suffered in the past few months.

"Pauline's fifteen francs were very useful to me. Fœdora, reflecting upon the probable emanations from the audience in the hall where we were to spend several hours, regretted that she had no bouquet; I went out to buy some flowers for her, I carried her my life and my fortune. I had a feeling of remorse and pleasure combined as I offered her a bouquet, the price of which gave me some idea of the enormous outlay incident to the superficial gallantry customary in society. Before long she complained of the too pungent odor of a Mexican jasmine, it caused her intolerable disgust to look at the audience from her seat on a hard bench, and she reproached me for taking her there. Although she was with me, she insisted upon going away and she went. And I had passed sleepless nights, I had wasted the means of existence for two months, and

still I had failed to please her! The demon had never seemed more affable or less emotional. During the drive home, sitting close beside her in a narrow coupé, I inhaled her breath, I touched her perfumed glove, I distinctly saw the treasures of her beauty, I inhaled an odorous vapor, sweet as the iris: all woman, yet not a woman. At that moment, a ray of light enabled me to penetrate the depths of that mysterious life. I suddenly thought of the book recently published by a poet, a genuinely artistic conception based on the statue of Polycles. I imagined that I was looking at that monster who, now in the guise of an officer, subdues a wild horse; again, as a young maiden, takes her place at her toilet-table and drives her lover to despair; and, as a lover, breaks a gentle, modest maiden's heart. Being unable to dissolve Fœdora in any other way, I told her that fanciful tale; but nothing suggested to her any resemblance between herself and that impossible conception, she was heartily amused by it, like a child by a fable taken from the *Thousand and One Nights*.

"'Fœdora must be held back by some mysterious power to resist the love of a man of my age, the communicative warmth of this noble contagion of the heart,' I said to myself, as I was walking home. 'Perhaps, like Lady Delacour, she is consumed by a cancer. Her life is evidently an artificial life.'

"At that thought, a cold shiver passed over me. Then I formed a plan, at once the most extravagant and the most sensible that ever occurred to a lover.

In order to examine that woman physically as I had studied her intellectually, in order to become thoroughly acquainted with her, in fact, I determined to pass a night in her room without her knowledge. This is how I carried out that undertaking, which consumed my heart as the thirst for revenge gnaws at the heart of a Corsican monk. On her reception-days, Fœdora received so numerous a company that it was impossible for the concierge to balance the entrances and exits with perfect accuracy. Feeling sure that I could remain in the house without causing any scandal, I impatiently awaited the countess's next evening. When I was dressing, I put a small English penknife in my pocket, in default of a dagger. If it were found upon me, that literary weapon would arouse no suspicion, and, being uncertain how far my romantic determination might carry me, I wished to be armed.

"When the salons began to fill, I went into the bedroom to see how the land lay, and found the blinds and shutters closed; that was lucky to begin with; as the maid might come and unfasten the curtains, which were draped back, I removed the hold-backs; I risked much in venturing thus to attend to the maid's duties in advance, but I had coolly reckoned the risks of my position and was resigned to them.

"About midnight, I went and concealed myself in the embrasure of a window. In order not to let my feet be seen, I tried to climb on the plinth of the wainscoting, with my back against the wall, and

clinging to the window fastening. After carefully adjusting my equilibrium, making sure of my points of support, and measuring the space between myself and the curtains, I succeeded in familiarizing myself with the difficulties of my position, so that I could maintain it without detection, if cramps and coughing and sneezing would leave me in peace. In order not to fatigue myself to no purpose, I stood erect until the arrival of the critical moment, when I must remain hung up like a spider in its web. The white moire and muslin of the curtains formed great folds like organ-pipes in front of me, and I made holes in them with my knife so that I could see all that was taking place. I heard vaguely the hum of the salons, the laughter and loud voices of the guests. That indistinct murmur, that distant tumult, gradually grew less. Some gentlemen came to the countess's table, near where I stood, to get their hats. When they brushed against the curtains, I shuddered as I thought of the absent-minded way in which people who are in a hurry to be gone search everywhere for their hats and coats. I augured well for the success of my enterprise when I escaped those perils. The last hat was taken by a former suitor of Fœdora's, who, fancying himself alone, glanced at the bed and heaved a deep sigh, followed by some forcible exclamation or other. The countess, when only four or five intimate friends remained in the boudoir adjoining her bedroom, proposed a cup of tea. Thereupon calumny, for which present-day society has reserved what little faith it still possesses,

was mingled with epigrams, clever judgments of men and things, and the clatter of cups and spoons. Merciless to my rivals, Rastignac called forth uproarious laughter by his stinging sallies.

"'Monsieur de Rastignac is a dangerous man to fall out with,' laughed the countess.

"'I believe you,' he replied, ingenuously. 'I have always been right in my hatreds—and in my friendships,' he added. 'My enemies serve me quite as well as my friends, perhaps. I have made a special study of the modern idiom and the natural artifices people use to attack or defend everything. Ministerial eloquence tends to improve society. If one of your friends has no wits, you speak of his probity, his sincerity. If another's work is dull, you refer to it as conscientious work. If the book is badly written, you praise the ideas it contains. Such a man is faithless, inconstant, escapes you at every turn: bah! he is fascinating, bewitching, he wields a spell. If your enemies are in question, you throw the dead and living at their heads; you turn the whole language upside down for them, and you are as sagacious in discovering their defects as you were adroit in placing your friend's virtues in relief. This application of the opera-glass to the moral sight is the secret of all our conversations, and is the whole art of the courtier. To neglect to use it is to undertake to fight unarmed against men bristling with steel like knights-bannerets. I use it! I abuse it, too, sometimes. And so people respect me, me and my friends, for my sword, by the way, is as potent as my tongue.'

"One of Fœdora's most fervent admirers, a young man who was noted for his impertinence, and who made use of it as a means of success, picked up the gauntlet thus scornfully thrown down by Rastignac. He spoke of me, and began to exalt my talents and my personal attractions beyond measure. Rastignac had forgotten that variety of evil-speaking. The young man's sardonic eulogy deceived the countess, who immolated me mercilessly; to amuse her friends, she betrayed my secrets, ridiculed my aspirations and my hopes.

"'He has a future before him,' said Rastignac. 'You may find him some day the man to take a cruel revenge; his talents are at least equal to his courage; so I look upon those who attack him as very foolhardy, for he has a good memory—'

"'And writes memoirs,' added the countess, who seemed offended at the silence that reigned in the room.

"'Memoirs of a false countess, madame,' retorted Rastignac. 'One needs a different sort of courage to write them.'

"'I believe he has a good deal of courage,' she replied, 'he is faithful to me.'

"I was seized with a strong temptation to show myself suddenly to the scoffers, like Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. I had lost a mistress, but I had a friend! But love suddenly whispered in my ear one of the cowardly, subtle paradoxes with which it lulls our sorrows to sleep.

"'If Fœdora loves me,' I thought, 'would she not

dissemble her love beneath a malicious jest? How often does the heart put to shame the falsehoods of the mouth!'

"But soon my impertinent rival, being left alone with the countess, started to take his leave.

"'What! already?' she said, in a cajoling tone, which made my heart beat fast. 'Won't you give me another moment? Have you nothing more to say to me, won't you sacrifice any of your pleasures to me?'

"He went away.

"'Ah!' she exclaimed, with a yawn, 'they are all very tiresome!'

"She pulled a bell-rope sharply, and the sound of the bell echoed through the apartments. The countess returned to her bedroom, humming a measure from the *Pria che spunti*. No one had ever heard her sing, and her silence gave rise to some extraordinary suppositions. She had, it was said, promised her first lover, who was delighted with her talents and jealous of her from beyond the grave, that she would never afford any other person a pleasure which he wished to be the only one to enjoy. I stretched every faculty to the utmost to catch the notes. Her voice rose higher and higher; Fœdora seemed to become animated, the rich capabilities of her throat unveiled themselves, and the air assumed a divine quality. The countess's voice had a mellow clearness of tone, an accuracy of pitch, an indefinable, harmonious, vibrating timbre that pierced and stirred and excited the heart. Musicians are almost

always of an amorous nature. She who sang thus must surely know how to love. Thus the beauty of her voice was an additional source of mystery in a woman already so mysterious. I saw her as plainly as I see you, she seemed to be listening to herself and to experience a sensuous delight which was peculiar to her; it was something like the joy of love. She stood before the fireplace as she finished the leading motif of the *rondo;* but when she ceased to sing, her face changed, her features relaxed and showed fatigue. She had removed her mask; actress that she was, her rôle was finished. And yet the sort of blight stamped upon her face by her artistic work, or by the evening's *ennui*, was not devoid of charm.

"'That is her true self!' I said to myself.

"She placed one foot on the bronze rail on top of the fender, as if to warm it, removed her gloves, unfastened her bracelets, and took off over her head a gold chain on which hung her smelling-bottle studded with precious stones. I felt an indescribable pleasure in watching her movements, instinct with the pretty grace of a cat making her toilet in the sun. She looked at herself in the mirror and said aloud, in an ill-humored tone:

"'I was not pretty to-night—my complexion is fading horribly fast.—Perhaps I ought to go to bed earlier, to give up this dissipated life.—But is Justine making sport of me?'

"She rang again; the maid came running in. Where was her room? I don't know. She came

by a secret staircase, I was anxious to see her. My poetic imagination had often been suspicious of that invisible servant, a tall, dark, well-built girl.

"'Did madame ring?'

"'Twice!' replied Fœdora. 'Are you thinking now of being deaf, pray?'

"'I was preparing some milk of almonds for madame.'

"Justine knelt, unfastened her mistress's gaiters and removed her shoes, while she, reclining carelessly in an easy-chair by the fire, yawned and scratched her head. All her movements were perfectly natural, nor was there any symptom indicating the secret trouble or the passions I had imagined.

"'Georges is in love,' she said, 'I shall dismiss him. Hasn't he fixed the curtains yet? What is he thinking of?'

"At that remark, all my blood flowed back to my heart; but the curtains were soon forgotten.

"'Life is very dull,' continued the countess.—'By the way, be careful not to scratch me as you did yesterday. Look at that,' she said, pointing to a little satiny knee, 'I still bear the mark of your claws.'

"She thrust her bare feet in velvet slippers lined with swan's-down, and unfastened her dress while Justine took up a comb to arrange her hair.

"'You must marry, madame, and have children.'

"'Children! that's all I need to finish me!' she cried. 'A husband! Show me the man to whom I could— Did my hair look well to-night?'

"'Not very well.'

"'You're a fool.'

"'There isn't anything more unbecoming to you than crimping your hair too much,' replied Justine. 'Thick, smooth curls look best on you.'

"'Really?'

"'Why, yes, madame, fluffy, crimped hair only looks well on blondes.'

"'Marry? no, no! Marriage is a kind of business I wasn't born for.'

"What a horrible scene for a lover! That lonely woman, without relatives or friends, an atheist in love, with no faith in any sentiment; and although the necessity of unbosoming herself, natural to every human creature, was very weak in her, she had no other means of satisfying it than to talk with her maid, to exchange trite, meaningless phrases with her! I had a feeling of pity for her. Justine unlaced her. I gazed at her with deep interest when the last veil was removed. She had a virgin-like waist and bust that dazzled me; through her chemise, her pink and white body gleamed in the candle-light like a silver statue beneath its envelope of gauze. No, there was no physical imperfection to cause her to dread the furtive glances of love. Alas! a lovely body will always triumph over the most heroic resolutions. The mistress seated herself in front of the fire, silent and pensive, while the maid lighted the candle in the alabaster lamp that hung beside the bed. She then brought a warming-pan, arranged the bed, and assisted her mistress to retire; and after spending a considerable time in performing various

petty duties which betrayed Fœdora's profound veneration for herself, the girl left the room. The countess turned over several times; she was excited, she sighed; her lips emitted a slight sound barely perceptible to the ear, which indicated an impatient frame of mind; she put out her hand, took a phial from the table, and poured four or five drops of a brown liquor into her milk before drinking it; at last, after several long-drawn sighs, she exclaimed:

"'*Mon Dieu!*'

"That exclamation, and particularly the tone in which she made it, broke my heart. Gradually her restless movements ceased. I was afraid; but soon I heard the strong, regular respiration of a sleeping person; I put aside the stiff curtains, quitted my position, and stood at the foot of the bed, gazing at her with an indefinable sentiment. She was enchanting so. Like a child, she was resting her arm above her head; her tranquil, pretty, lace-begirt face wore a sweet expression that inflamed my senses. Presuming too much upon my strength, I had underestimated my torment: to be so near her and yet so far away! I was forced to undergo all the tortures which I had unwittingly prepared for myself. '*Mon Dieu!*' that fragment of an unknown thought, which was the only ray of light that I had to carry away with me, had suddenly changed my ideas concerning Fœdora. That exclamation, whether insignificant or possessed of deep meaning, could be interpreted with equal reason as an expression of pleasure or sorrow, as called forth by bodily or mental pain.

Was it an imprecation or a prayer, a memory or a thought of the future, regret or dread? There was in those two words a whole life, a life of poverty or of wealth; there was even a suggestion of crime! The enigma hidden in that lovely simulacrum of a woman rose again before me; Fœdora could be explained in so many ways that she was inexplicable. The caprices of the breath that passed between her teeth, now faint, now loud, grave or gay, formed a sort of language to which I attached thoughts and feelings. I dreamed with her, I hoped to fathom her secrets by penetrating the mysteries of her slumber, I wavered between a thousand conflicting plans, a thousand opinions. At sight of that lovely, pure, placid face, it was impossible for me to deny the woman a heart. I determined to make one more attempt. By telling her of my life, my love, my sacrifices, perhaps I might arouse pity in her heart, force a tear from her who never wept.

"I had determined to stake all my hopes on that last test, when sounds in the street told me that day was breaking. There was a moment when I imagined Fœdora waking in my arms. I could gently take my place beside her and throw my arms about her. The idea took possession of me so despotically that, being determined to resist it, I rushed into the salon without taking the slightest precaution to avoid making a noise; but luckily I happened upon a secret door that opened on a narrow staircase. As I hoped, the key was in the lock; I closed the door noisily, went boldly down into the courtyard, and, without

looking to see if I was observed, reached the street in three bounds.

"Two days later, a certain author was to read a comedy in the countess's salon; I went there, proposing to myself to remain until the last in order to proffer a strange request to her; I intended to ask her to give me the following evening, and to devote it to me exclusively, closing her door to all others. When I was alone with her, my heart failed me. Every stroke of the clock terrified me. It was quarter to twelve.

"'If I don't speak to her,' I said to myself, 'I must beat out my brains against the corner of the mantelpiece.'

"I gave myself three minutes more; the three minutes passed and I did not beat out my brains against the marble; my heart was as heavy as a sponge soaked in water.

"'You are extremely agreeable,' she said.

"'Ah! madame,' I replied, 'if you only could understand me!'

"'What's the matter with you? You are pale as death.'

"'I am trying to make up my mind to ask a favor of you.'

"She encouraged me with a gesture, and I asked her for the appointment for the next evening.

"'Willingly,' said she. 'But why don't you speak to me now?'

"'To avoid deceiving you, I must let you see the extent of what you agree to do: I desire to pass

the evening with you as if we were brother and sister. Have no fear, I know your antipathies; you must know me well enough to be certain that I do not propose to ask anything of you that will offend you; besides, audacious people don't begin in this way. You have been friendly to me, you are kind-hearted and indulgent. I will tell you this, that I intend to bid you farewell to-morrow.—Don't withdraw your consent!' I cried, as I saw her open her mouth to speak.

"And I disappeared.

*

"It was about eight o'clock one evening last May that I found myself alone with Fœdora in her Gothic boudoir. I did not tremble, for I was sure of a happy ending. Either my mistress would belong to me, or I would take refuge in the arms of death. I had passed sentence on my cowardly love. A man is very strong when he admits his weakness. The countess, in a blue cashmere dress, was reclining on a divan with her feet on a cushion. An oriental beretta—a form of headgear that painters attribute to the early Hebrews—added an indefinable, alluring element of singularity to her attractions. Her face was instinct with a fleeting charm, which seemed to prove that we are never the same for two successive moments, that we are unique creatures, entirely different from the *we* of the future and the *we* of the past. I had never seen her so brilliantly beautiful.

"'Do you know that you have aroused my curiosity?' she said, with a laugh.

"'I will not betray it,' I replied, sitting down beside her and taking her hand, which she abandoned to me. 'You have a very sweet voice!'

"'You never heard it!' she cried, with an involuntary gesture of surprise.

"'I will prove to your satisfaction that I have, when the time comes. Can it be that your delightful

singing is a mystery, too? Don't be alarmed, I have no desire to probe it.'

"We sat together for about an hour, talking familiarly. Although I assumed the tone, the manners, and the general behavior of a man to whom Fœdora was likely to refuse nothing, I also exhibited all the respect of a lover. By that means I earned the favor of kissing her hand; she removed her glove with a coquettish movement, and I was so blissfully wrapped in the illusion in which I strove to believe, that my heart burst and overflowed in that kiss. Fœdora, with incredible complaisance, allowed me to flatter and caress her. But do not accuse me of imbecility; if I had attempted to take one step beyond that fraternal petting, I should have felt the cat's claws. For about ten minutes we were absolutely silent. I admired her, endowing her with charms which her every act belied. At that moment, she was mine, mine only. I possessed that fascinating creature in the only way in which it was possible to possess her—intuitively; I encompassed her in my passion, embraced her, strained her to my heart, my imagination married her. I vanquished the countess by the power of a magnetic glance. I have always regretted that I did not bring her absolutely to my feet; but at that moment I had no designs upon her body, I craved a heart, a life, ideal, perfect happiness, a beautiful dream in which we do not long believe.

"'Madame,' I said to her, finally, feeling that the last hour of my intoxication had arrived, 'listen to me. I love you, as you know; I have told you so a

thousand times and you must have heard me. As I did not choose to owe your love to the accomplishments of a coxcomb, nor to the flatteries or importunities of a fool, you have failed to understand me. How many pangs have I suffered for you, of which you were the perfectly innocent cause! But in a few moments you shall pass judgment on me. There are two kinds of poverty, madame. The kind that parades the streets shamelessly in rags, that unwittingly reproduces the habits of Diogenes, living on a small quantity of food, reducing life to its simplest terms; happier than opulence, perhaps, but at all events indifferent, it takes up the world where the great cast it aside. Then there is luxurious poverty, a Spanish variety, which conceals destitution beneath a title; proud, beplumed, that white-waistcoated, yellow-gloved poverty rides in carriages and loses a fortune for lack of a centime. One is the poverty of the common people, the other that of sharpers, kings, and men of talent. I am neither people, king, nor sharper; perhaps I have no talent: I am an exception. My name bids me die rather than beg.—Never fear, madame, I am rich to-day, I possess all of the earth that I need,' I said, seeing that her face assumed the icy expression that invades our features when we are surprised by fashionable alms-gatherers. 'Do you remember the day when you chose to go to the Gymnase without me, thinking that I would not be there?'

"She nodded her head.

"'I spent my last five-franc piece to go there to

see you. Do you remember our excursion to the Jardin des Plantes? Your carriage cost me my whole fortune.'

"I told her of my sacrifices, I described my life to her, not as I am describing it to you to-day, in the drunkenness of wine, but in the noble intoxication of the heart. My passion gushed out through my flaming eyes, in outbursts of sentiment, since forgotten, which neither art nor memory could reproduce. It was not the tame outpouring of a detested love; my love, in its force and the beauty of its hope, inspired words of the sort that foreshadow the whole future of a life echoing the shrieks of a lacerated heart. The accent was that of the last prayer offered up by a dying man on the battle-field. She wept. I paused. Great God! her tears were the result of the artificial emotion that we buy for a hundred sous at the door of a theatre; I had achieved the success to which a good actor aspires.

"'If I had known—' she began.

"'Do not finish!' I cried. 'At this moment, I still love you dearly enough to kill you—'

"She made a motion to seize the bell-rope. I roared with laughter.

"'Don't ring,' I continued. 'I will allow you to finish out your life in peace. To kill you would be a misapprehension of hatred! Do not be afraid of violence: I passed a whole night at the foot of your bed without—'

"'Monsieur,' she said, blushing scarlet.

"But, after that first impulse of the modesty which

every woman, even the most insensible, is certain to possess, she cast a withering glance at me, and said:

"'You must have been very cold!'

"'Do you imagine, madame, that your beauty is so precious to me?' I rejoined, divining the thoughts by which her mind was agitated. 'Your face, to my mind, gives promise of a soul even more beautiful than itself. Ah! madame, the men who see nothing but woman in a woman can purchase, every night, sultanas worthy of the harem and procure happiness at a low price. But I was ambitious, I wished to live heart to heart with you, with you who have no heart. I know it now. If you should belong to any other man, I would kill him. But no, you would love him, and his death might grieve you.—How miserable I am!' I cried.

"'If you can find any consolation in this promise,' she said, gayly, 'I can assure you that I shall never belong to any man—'

"'Ah!' I exclaimed, interrupting her, 'you insult God himself, and you will be punished for it. Some day you will lie on your couch, unable to endure noise or light, condemned to live in a sort of tomb, and you will suffer unheard-of torture. When you look about for the cause of that slow, avenging agony, remember the woes that you have scattered broadcast on your passage through life! Having sown imprecations everywhere, you will reap hatred. We are the judges, the executioners, of a tribunal that holds sway here on earth, and takes rank above the tribunals of men, below that of God.'

"'Ah! I have no doubt that I am a great criminal not to love you,' she retorted, with a laugh. 'But is it my fault? No, I do not love you; you are a man, and that is enough. I am happy alone, why should I exchange my life—a selfish life, if you choose—to obey the whims of a master? Marriage is a sacrament by virtue of which we bestow only disappointment on each other. Furthermore, children bore me. Didn't I give you fair warning of my character? Why aren't you satisfied with my friendship? I would be glad if I could console you for the pain I have caused you by not divining the state of your finances; I appreciate the extent of your sacrifices; but love alone can repay your devotion, your delicate attentions, and I love you so little that this scene affects me unpleasantly.'

"'I know what an absurd figure I make, and I beg you to forgive me,' I said, gently, unable to restrain my tears. 'I love you well enough,' I continued, 'to enjoy listening to the cruel words you utter. Ah! I would that I might seal my love with all my blood!'

"'All men use substantially the same time-worn phrases,' she retorted, laughing still. 'But it would seem to be a difficult matter to die at our feet, for I meet these dead men at every turn.—It is twelve o'clock, permit me to retire.'

"'And in two hours you will exclaim: *Mon Dieu!*' said I.

"'The night before last! Yes,' she said, 'I was thinking of my broker, I had forgotten to tell him to

change my five per cents into threes and the threes had fallen during the day.'

"I glared at her with eyes blazing with rage. Ah! I realized then how a crime may be a whole poem in itself. Being familiar, doubtless, with the most impassioned declarations, she had already forgotten my tears and my words.

"'Would you marry a peer of France?' I asked her, coldly.

"'Perhaps so, if he were a duke.'

"I took my hat and bowed to her.

"'Allow me to escort you as far as the outer door of my suite,' she said, with the most cutting irony in her manner, in the tilt of her head and in her accent.

"'Madame—'

"'Monsieur?'

"'I shall never see you again.'

"'I trust not,' she retorted, bowing with an impertinent expression.

"'You wish to be a duchess?' I said, urged on by a sort of frenzy which her gesture kindled in my heart. 'You are mad for titles and honors? Very well, only allow me to love you, bid my pen to speak, my voice to resound for none but you, be the secret guiding principle of my life, be my star! Do not accept me for your husband until I am minister, peer of France, duke! I will make myself whatever you want me to be!'

"'You made good use of your time in the solicitor's office,' she said, with a smile; 'your arguments have plenty of heat.'

"'You have the present,' I cried, 'and I the future! I lose only a wife and you lose a name, a family. Time is big with my revenge: it will bring you ugliness and a lonely death; to me, renown!'

"'Thanks for the peroration!' she said, stifling a yawn, and manifesting plainly in her attitude her desire to see the last of me.

"That sneer closed my mouth. I hurled my hatred at her in a glance and fled. It was necessary for me to forget Fœdora, cure myself of my madness, resume my solitary, studious life, or die. So I set myself tasks of extraordinary length, I was determined to finish my works. For a fortnight I did not leave my garret, and I spent my nights in toilsome study. Despite my courage and the inspiration of my despair, I worked with difficulty, and by fits and starts. My muse had taken flight. I could not drive away Fœdora's resplendent, mocking phantom. Everyone of my thoughts concealed another diseased thought, an intangible desire, as terrible as remorse. I imitated the anchorites of the Thebaid. Although I did not pray like them, I lived in a desert as they did, hollowing out my heart instead of hollowing out cliffs. I would, if I could, have girt my loins with a girdle studded with sharp points, to subdue mental pain by physical pain.

"One evening, Pauline ventured into my room.

"'You are killing yourself,' she said, in an imploring voice; 'you must go out, go and see your friends.'

"'Ah! Pauline, your prediction is fulfilled. Fœdora

is killing me, I want to die. Life is unendurable to me.'

"'Is there but one woman in the world, pray?' she said, with a smile. 'Why do you invite such infinite suffering in such a short life?'

"I stared at Pauline in stupid wonder. She left me alone. I did not notice her departure, I had heard her voice without grasping the sense of her words. Before long I was obliged to carry the manuscript of my memoirs to my literary contractor. Absorbed by my passion, I had no idea how I had been able to live without money; I simply knew that the four hundred and fifty francs due me would suffice to pay my debts; I went to get my wages, therefore, and happened to meet Rastignac, who found me changed, much thinner.

"'What hospital do you come from?' he exclaimed.

"'That woman is killing me,' was my reply. 'I can neither despise her nor forget her.'

"'It would be better to kill her; then, perhaps, you will stop thinking about her,' he laughed.

"'I have thought seriously of it,' I replied. 'But although I sometimes refresh my soul with the thought of a crime, rape or murder, or both together, I find that I am incapable of committing it in reality. The countess is a beautiful monster who would cry for mercy, and every man isn't an Othello who'd like to be.'

"'She's like all women we can't have,' said Rastignac, interrupting me.

"'I am mad!' I cried. 'At times I feel madness roaring in my brain. My ideas are like ghosts, they dance about in front of me and I can't catch them. I prefer death to this sort of life. So I am conscientiously looking about for the best method of putting an end to this struggle. It's no longer a question of the real Fœdora, the Fœdora of Faubourg Saint-Honoré, but of my Fœdora, the one that is here!' I said, striking my forehead. 'What do you think of opium?'

"'Bah! frightful agony,' replied Rastignac.

"'Suffocation?'

"'Horribly vulgar!'

"'The Seine?'

"'The nets and the Morgue are very dirty.'

"'A pistol shot?'

"'And if you miss, you're disfigured for life. Listen,' he added; 'like all young men, I have contemplated suicide. Which one of us hasn't killed himself two or three times over before he is thirty? I have discovered no better way than to wear out an existence with dissipation. Plunge deep into debauchery, and either you or your passion will perish there. Intemperance, my dear fellow, is the queen of all deaths. Has it not resistless apoplexy at its command? Apoplexy is a pistol ball that doesn't miss you. Debauches afford all sorts of physical enjoyment in abundance; what are they but opium in small doses? By compelling us to drink to excess, debauchery hurls mortal defiance at wine. Did not the Duke of Clarence's cask of Malvoisie taste better

IN THE FAUBOURG SAINT-HONORÉ

"'Time is big with my revenge: it will bring you ugliness and a lonely death; to me, renown!'

"'Thanks for the peroration!' she said, stifling a yawn, and manifesting plainly in her attitude her desire to see the last of me.

"That sneer closed my mouth. I hurled my hatred at her in a glance and fled."

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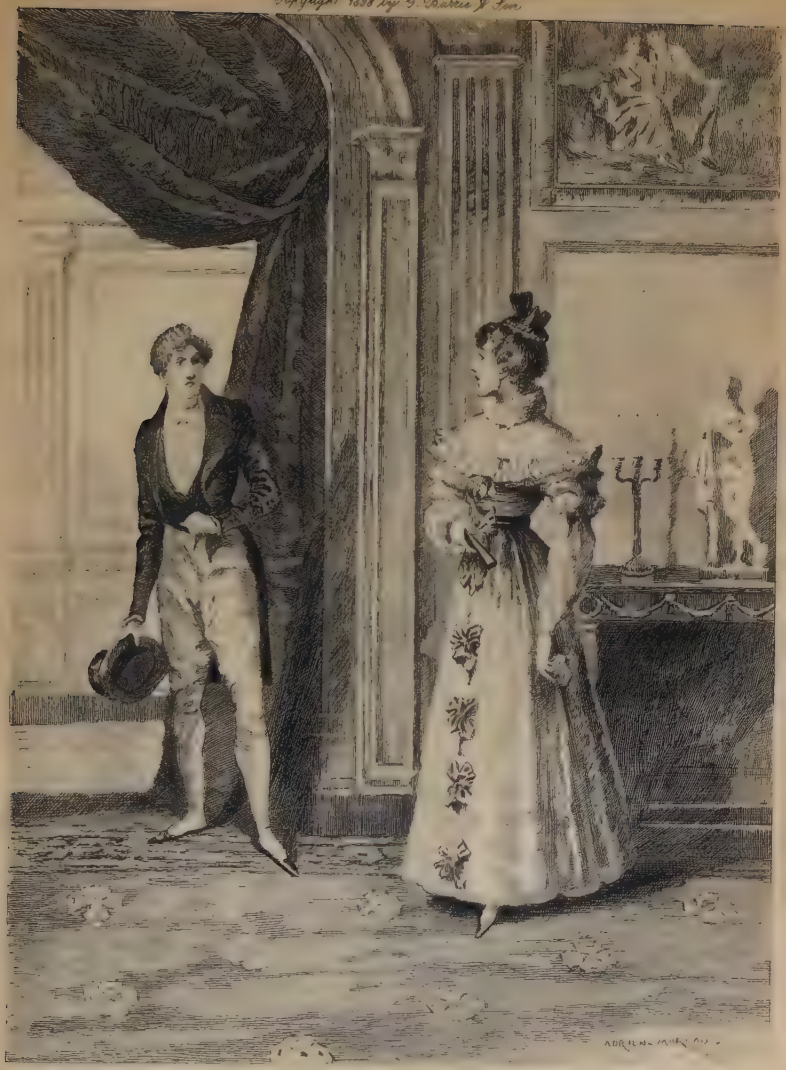

than the muddy water of the Seine? When we fall nobly under the table, it's a little periodical attack of asphyxia, isn't it? If the patrol picks us up, do we not, as we lie stretched out on the cold beds in the guard-house, enjoy all the pleasures of the Morgue, minus the swollen, bloated, blue and green stomachs, and plus the knowledge of what is going on? Ah! the long suicide I describe isn't like the death of a bankrupt grocer. Merchants have dishonored the river, they jump into the water to melt the hearts of their creditors. If I were in your place, I would try to die in a refined way. If you choose to create a new kind of death by fighting that sort of a duel with life, I'll be your second. I am bored, I am disappointed. The Alsatian whom it was suggested that I should marry has six toes on her left foot, and I can't live with a woman who has six toes! it would be found out and I should cut an absurd figure. She has only eighteen thousand francs a year; her fortune shrinks and her toes increase in number. The devil take her!—By leading the wildest kind of a life, we may happen upon good luck!'

"Rastignac carried me with him. That scheme presented too many potent fascinations, it kindled too many hopes; in fact, it had a too poetic coloring not to attract a poet.

"'But what about money?' I said.

"'Haven't you four hundred and fifty francs?'

"'Yes, but I owe my tailor, my landlady—'

"'Do you propose to pay your tailor? You'll never be anything, not even a minister!'

"'But what can we do with twenty louis?'

"'Play.'

"I shuddered.

"'Well, well!' he exclaimed, observing my prudery, 'you intend to make a start on what I call the *dissipational system*, and you're afraid of a green cloth!'

"'Listen,' I replied, 'I promised my father never to put my foot inside a gambling-house! Not only is that promise sacred, but I have an invincible feeling of horror every time I pass one of the dens; take these three hundred francs and go there alone. While you are risking our fortune, I will go and put my affairs in order, and then wait for you at your rooms.'

"That, my dear fellow, is the way I destroyed myself. It is enough to throw a young man's whole life out of gear to meet a woman who doesn't love him or a woman who loves him too much. Happiness swallows up our strength, as unhappiness extinguishes our virtues. Returning to the Hôtel de Saint-Quentin, I gazed long at the garret where I had led the chaste life of a scholar, a life that might, perhaps, have been long and honorable and that I ought never to have abandoned for the life of passion that led me into an abyss. Pauline surprised me in a melancholy posture.

"'Why, what's the matter?' she said.

"I rose coldly and counted out the money I owed her mother, adding to it the amount of my rent for six months. She watched me with a sort of dismayed expression.

"'I am going to leave you, my dear Pauline.'

"'I guessed as much!' she cried.

"'Listen, my child, I do not say that I shall never return. Keep my cell for me for six months. If I have not returned by the 15th of November, you will be my heir. This sealed manuscript,' I said, pointing to a bundle of papers, 'is the copy of my great work on *the Will:* you must deposit it at the King's Library. As for whatever else I leave here, you may do what you please with it.'

"She looked at me with an expression that weighed upon my heart. Pauline was like a living conscience.

"'So I shall have no more lessons?' she said, pointing to the piano.

"I did not answer.

"'Will you write to me?'

"'Adieu, Pauline!'

"I drew her gently to my side and imprinted a brother's kiss, an old man's kiss, upon her brow of love, pure as the snow that has not reached the earth. She ran away. I did not wish to see Madame Gaudin. I put my key in the usual place and left the house. As I turned out of Rue de Cluny, I heard a woman's light step behind me.

"'I embroidered this purse for you, will you refuse it, too?' said Pauline.

"I thought that I saw, by the light of the street lantern, a tear in Pauline's eye, and I sighed. Actuated both by the same thought, perhaps, we separated with the eager haste of people flying from the plague.

"The life of dissipation to which I had resolved to abandon myself seemed to me to be oddly shadowed forth in the room in which, with lordly nonchalance, I awaited Rastignac's return. In the centre of the mantel stood a clock surmounted by a Venus crouching on a tortoise, and holding a half-smoked cigar in her hand. Dainty furniture, love-gifts, were scattered about the room. Old slippers lay on a sumptuous couch. The comfortable arm-chair with springs in which I was buried bore scars like an old soldier, the arms were torn and ragged, and the pomade and hair-oil contributed by the heads of all his friends were incrusted on the back. Opulence and poverty artlessly joined hands in the bed, on the walls, everywhere. You would have said that you were in a Neapolitan palace occupied by lazzaroni. It was the room of a gambler or a rake whose luxury is entirely personal, who lives on sensations and worries little about incongruities. Nor did the picture lack an element of poesy. Life appeared there with its spangles and its tatters, startling, incomplete, as it really is, but intense, fantastic as during a halt where the marauder has laid violent hands upon everything that takes his eye. A volume of Byron, from which many pages were missing, had served to kindle the fagots of the young man who stakes a thousand francs at play and hasn't the wherewithal to buy a stick of wood, who rides in his tilbury and doesn't own a sound, whole shirt. To-morrow a countess, an actress, a game of écarté, may furnish him with a wardrobe fit

for a king. Here a wax-candle was stuck in the green cover of a tinder-box; there lay a woman's picture despoiled of its frame of wrought gold. How could a young man naturally hungry for excitement renounce the fascinations of a life so rich in contrasts, a life which affords him the pleasures of war in times of peace? I was almost asleep when Rastignac burst open his chamber door with a kick and cried:

"'Victory! we can die at our leisure.'

"He showed me his hat heaping full of gold, then placed it on the table, and we danced around like two cannibals with a victim to feed upon, roaring, stamping, jumping, hitting each other with our fists hard enough to kill a rhinoceros, and singing wildly at the sight of all known earthly pleasures contained in that hat.

"'Twenty-seven thousand francs,' said Rastignac, adding a few bank-notes to the pile of gold. 'Other people would find that enough to live on, but will it suffice for us to die on? Oh, yes! we will expire in a bath of gold.—Hurrah!'

"And we capered about the room anew. We divided the treasure like co-heirs, piece for piece, beginning with the double napoléons, going from the large pieces to the small, and prolonging our joy by saying every time: 'Yours! mine!'

"'We won't go to bed,' cried Rastignac. 'Joseph, bring punch!'

"He tossed some money to his faithful servant.

"'There's your share,' he said; 'bury yourself if you can.'

"The next day I bought some furniture at Lesage's, I hired the apartment where you knew me on Rue Taitbout, and employed the best of upholsterers to decorate it. I had horses. I plunged into a maelstrom of pleasures, at once hollow and genuine. I gambled, I won and lost enormous sums, but at balls or at my friends' houses; never in public gambling-hells, for which I retained my former pious horror. I gradually made friends. I owed their attachment to quarrels or to the trustful facility with which we betray our secrets when degrading ourselves in company; it may be, too, that we cling together more readily by means of our vices. I ventured upon some literary compositions upon which I was complimented. The great men of the literary trade, not looking upon me as a rival to be feared, praised me, less on account of my individual merit, I doubt not, than to annoy their confrères. I became a *viveur*, to use the consecrated picturesque expression of your jargon of debauchery. I considered that my honor was involved in killing myself speedily, in outdoing the most jovial bloods in ardor and force. I was always fresh and elegant. I was considered a bright man. There was nothing in my appearance to suggest that shocking mode of life which transforms man into a hogshead, a digestive apparatus, a luxurious beast. Ere long, debauchery appeared to me in all its ghastly majesty, and I understood it! Surely the wise men of sober lives who label bottles for their heirs can have no true conception either of the theory of this broad life or of its normal condition;

can you inculcate a love of poetry in provincials to whom opium and tea, with all their delights, are simply a couple of drugs? Even in Paris, that capital of thought, do we not find imperfect sybarites? Unequal to the burden of excessive pleasure, do they not go home tired out from a debauch, like the worthy bourgeois who, after listening to a new opera by Rossini, condemn music? And do they not finally abandon the life, just as a sober man refuses to eat pâtés de Ruffec a second time because the first one gave him indigestion? Dissipation is certainly an art, like poetry, and demands a powerful mind. To grasp its mysteries, to appreciate its beauties, a man must make a conscientious study of it, so to speak. Like all sciences, it is at first thorny and unpleasant. Tremendous obstacles encompass man's keenest pleasures, not the separate concrete enjoyments, but the system that makes the rarest sensations a matter of habit, sums them all up and fructifies them, creating a second dramatic life within his life, necessitating an extensive and speedy dissipation of his forces. War, power, the arts, are different forms of corruption placed just as far out of human reach, as profound as dissipation, and all are difficult of approach. But when a man has once marched forward to the assault of those great mysteries, is he not in a new world? Generals, ministers, and artists all are drawn toward dissolute lives with more or less force by the necessity of having some violent means of diverting their thoughts from their own lives, which are so different from the lives of most men. After

all, war is a debauch of the blood as politics is a debauch of men's selfish interest. All forms of excess are brothers. Those social monstrosities possess the same power of suction as deep chasms, they draw us toward them as Saint Helena drew Napoléon; they cause vertigo, they fascinate, and we long to see their lowest depths without knowing why. It may be that the thought of infinity exists in those abysses, perhaps they contain some hidden knowledge flattering to man; does he not arouse interest, then, by his own personality? For a contrast to the paradise of his hours of study, to the delights of conception, the weary artist demands rest upon the Sabbath, like God, or the joys of hell, like Satan, so that he may neutralize the labor of his faculties by the labor of his senses. Lord Byron's relaxation must be something different from the chattering game of boston that delights a small annuitant; being a poet, he sighed for Greece to stake against Mahmoud. In war man becomes an exterminating angel, a sort of gigantean headsman. Must it not require a most extraordinary fascination to persuade us to accept those cruel sufferings, destructive of our frail envelope, which encompass our passions like a girdle of thorns? Although the smoker may writhe in convulsions and suffer agony after using tobacco to excess, has he not attended, under its auspices, delightful fêtes in strange regions? Has not Europe again and again plunged into war afresh without even taking time to wipe her feet, drenched with blood to the ankles? And has not mankind, taken as a

whole, its periods of drunkenness, as nature has its paroxysms of love? To the obscure man, the Mirabeau who vegetates under a peaceful reign and dreams of tempests, debauchery includes everything, it is a constant reaching out of one's whole life, or, better still, a duel with an unknown power, a monster: at first the monster frightens you, you must attack him by grasping his horns; the feeling of weariness is beyond belief. Nature has given you a narrow, indolent stomach; you conquer it, you enlarge it, you learn to carry your wine, you tame drunkenness, you pass sleepless nights—in short, you make for yourself the constitution of a colonel of cuirassiers, creating yourself a second time, as if to rail at God!

"When a man has thus metamorphosed himself, when the novice, now an old soldier, has accustomed his mind to the artillery, his legs to the soldier's gait, without as yet surrendering to the monster, but uncertain which of the two is master, they twist and roll over each other, now victorious, now vanquished, in a sphere where everything is abnormal, where the sorrows of the mind are lulled to sleep, where naught lives but the phantoms of ideas. That fierce struggle has already become necessary. Like the fabulous personages who, according to old legends, sold their souls to the devil in exchange for the power of doing evil, the dissipated man barters his death for all the enjoyments of life, abundant and fruitful! Instead of flowing on forever between two monotonous banks,

in the depths of a counting-room or an office, existence foams and races like a mountain stream. In a word, debauchery certainly is to the body what mystic pleasures are to the soul. Drunkenness plunges you in dreams whose fantastic visions are as curious as those of religious frenzy can possibly be. You pass hours as enchanting as a maiden's fantasies, delightful chats with friends, words which depict a whole life, frank, unreserved joys, journeys without fatigue, whole poems suggested in a few phrases. The brutal satisfaction of the beast, to whose depths science has penetrated in search of a soul, is followed by a blissful torpor for which men sigh when tired out by their mental activity. Do they not all feel the need of absolute repose, and is not dissipation a sort of tax which genius pays to evil? Look at all the great men you know: if they are not dissipated, it is because nature made them puny creatures. Some power, scoffing or jealous, blights them in mind or body in order to neutralize the efforts of their talent. During your wine-sodden hours, men and things appear before you wearing your livery. King of creation, you transform them at your pleasure. Through that constant delirium the demon of play pours his molten lead into your veins at your will. Some day you belong to the monster, and then you have, as I had, an insane awakening: helplessness is sitting at your bedside. Old warrior that you are, consumption is devouring you; diplomatist, an aneurism holds death hanging by a thread in your heart; to me it may be that

pneumonia will soon say: 'Let us be off!' as it said to Raphael Urbino, killed by excess of love. Such has my life been! I made my appearance in the world too soon or too late; doubtless my power would have been a source of danger there, if I had not deadened it thus; the universe was cured of Alexander by the cup of Hercules at the close of a debauch! However, certain abortive destinies must have heaven or hell, debauchery or the hospice on Mont Saint-Bernard. I had not the courage just now to preach to those two creatures," he said, pointing to Euphrasie and Aquilina. Were they not my story personified, an image of my life? I could hardly accuse them, for they seemed to me like judges. In the midst of that living poem, that bewildering disease, there were, however, two crises very fertile in bitter pangs. In the first place, a few days after I had thrown myself, like Sardanapalus, on my funeral pile, I met Fœdora in the vestibule at the Bouffons. We were both waiting for our carriages.

"'I see that you are still alive.'

"The sneer was the translation of her smile, of the malicious words that she said in an undertone to her cicisbeo, telling him my story, I doubt not, and passing judgment on my love as a commonplace, ordinary love. She applauded her false sagacity. Oh! to be dying for her, to adore her still, to see her in my drunken orgies lying in the bed of a courtesan, and to feel that I was the butt of her jests! To be powerless to tear my breast asunder and pluck out my heart to throw it at her feet!

"I speedily exhausted my treasure; but three years of dieting had made me most robust, and on the day when I found myself without a sou I was in the best of health. To help me along on the road to death, I signed notes of hand on short time, and the day of payment arrived. Cruel emotion! and how it stirs the life in a youthful heart! I was not built to grow old so soon; my heart was still young, fresh, and full of life. My first debt recalled all my virtues, which came with dragging steps and seemed to me to be in despair. I knew how to compromise with them, as we do with our old aunts, who begin by scolding us and end by giving us tears and money. My imagination, more pitiless, showed me my name wandering from city to city through all the market-places of Europe. *Our name is ourselves*, said Eusèbe Salverte. After wandering far, I returned, like a German's double, to my room, which I had not left, and awoke with a start. I hated them in advance, those men from the Bank, those images of commercial remorse, dressed in gray, wearing their master's livery, a silver badge, whom I used to look upon with indifference as they walked through the streets of Paris. Would not one of them come some morning and demand payment of the eleven notes on which I had scrawled my name? My signature worth three thousand francs,—why, my whole body wasn't worth it! The bailiffs, with faces insensible to despair in any shape, even to death itself, rose before me like the executioner who says to the doomed man: 'It is half-past three.' Their clerks

had the right to seize me, to scribble my name, to debase it, to make sport of it. I WAS IN DEBT! Does a man in debt belong to himself? Could not other men demand an account of my life? why I had eaten puddings *à la chipolata?* why I drank iced champagne? why I slept, walked, thought, amused myself, and did not pay them? In the midst of a poetic conception, a pregnant thought, or at the breakfast table, surrounded by friends and merriment and kindly raillery, I could see a fellow in a nut-brown coat, with a shabby hat in his hand, enter the room. That fellow would be my debt, my note of hand, a spectre that would cast a blight upon my pleasure, would force me to leave the table to speak to him; he would carry off my merriment, my mistress, everything, even to my bed. Remorse is easier to bear, for it doesn't turn us into the street nor land us at Sainte-Pélagie, it does not plunge us into that detestable sink of vice; it only leads us to the scaffold, where the headsman ennobles the victim: at the moment that the axe falls, everybody believes in your innocence; whereas society denies all virtue to the penniless rake. And those debts on two legs, dressed in green, who wear blue spectacles or carry multicolored umbrellas; those incarnate debts by which we are suddenly confronted at a street-corner, just when we have a smile on our lips—those fiends will have the infernal privilege of saying: 'Monsieur de Valentin owes me and doesn't pay. I have him now. Ah! he'd better receive me with a good grace!'—We must bow to our creditors,

bow to them graciously.—'When do you propose to pay me?' they retort. And we are compelled to lie, to beg another man for money, to humble ourselves to a boor sitting on his strong-box, to submit to his cold glance, his bloodsucker's glance, more irritating than a blow, to put up with his Barrême morality and his dense ignorance. A debt is a work of the imagination which they do not comprehend. Generous impulses often allure and control a borrower, whereas nothing great ever influences, no generous sentiment ever guides, the conduct of those who live in money and know nothing but money. I had a horror of money. The note of hand may be metamorphosed into an old man burdened with a family and flanked by virtues. Perhaps I was in debt to some living picture by Greuze, a paralytic surrounded by children, a soldier's widow, all of whom would hold out their hands imploringly to me. Terrible creditors, with whom one must needs weep for sympathy, and when we have paid them, we still owe them alms.

"The night before the notes matured, I went to bed with the false tranquillity of people who sleep calmly before their execution, before a duel; they always allow themselves to be soothed by a false hope. But when I woke, when I was fully conscious, when I felt that my very soul was confined in a banker's portfolio, lying upon statements, written in red ink, then my debts sprang up everywhere like grasshoppers; they were in my clock, on my chairs, or imbedded in the articles of furniture which I most

enjoyed using. Ah! those dear, inanimate slaves, having become the prey of the harpies at the Châtelet, would be carried off by tipstaves and brutally flung into the street. Ah! my plunder was in very truth myself.—The door-bell rang in my heart, it struck me where kings should be struck, in the head. It was martyrdom without Heaven for reward. Yes, for a man of generous instincts a debt is hell, but hell peopled by bailiffs and brokers. An unpaid debt is a disgraceful thing, a beginning of knavery, and, worse than all, a lie! it is a rough draught of crime, it brings together the timbers of the scaffold.

"My notes of hand were protested. Three days later I paid them; this is how I did it. A speculator proposed to me that I should sell him the island in the Loire on which my mother was buried. When I signed the deed at the office of the purchaser's notary, I felt in that dark room a blast of cold air like that in a cellar. I shuddered as I recognized the same damp chill that had seized me on the brink of the grave in which my father lay. I greeted that incident as an omen of evil. It seemed to me that I could hear my mother's voice and see her shade; a power that I cannot define kept my own name ringing in my ears amid the jangling of bells! The price of my island left me two thousand francs after all my debts were paid. Of course, I could have resumed the peaceful existence of the scholar, have returned to my garret after my experience of life, with my head filled with weighty observations and already possessed of something like reputation. But Fœdora

had not relaxed her hold upon her prey. We often met. I caused my name to be dinned into her ears by her lovers, who were amazed at my wit, my horses, my carriages, my success. She continued unmoved and insensible to everything, even the appalling words uttered by Rastignac: 'He is killing himself for you!' I enlisted the whole world in my vengeance, but I was not happy! While digging thus into the slime of life, I had always felt more keenly the joy of requited love. I pursued its phantom through the vagaries of my dissipated courses, in the midst of my orgies. To my misery, I was deceived in my fond beliefs, I was punished for my benefactions with ingratitude, rewarded for my sins by innumerable pleasures. Baleful philosophy, but true in regard to dissipation! In fact, Fœdora had infected me with the leprosy of her vanity. On probing my mind, I found it eaten by gangrene, putrefied. The devil had stamped my brow with the print of his cloven hoof. It was impossible for me thenceforth to do without the constant sensations of a life constantly endangered, or the hateful luxuries of wealth. Had I been worth millions I should still have gambled, thrown away my money, and led a riotous life; I was unwilling to be alone. I felt the need of the society of harlots, false friends, wine, and good cheer to distract my thoughts. The ties that attach a man to his family were broken forever. A galley-slave of pleasure, I had my destiny of suicide to fulfil. During the last days of my wealth, I indulged in the most frightful excesses

every night; but every morning death threw me back into life. Like an annuitant, I might have walked fearlessly through flames. At last I found myself with a single twenty-franc piece, I remembered Rastignac's good luck—"

"Aha!" cried Raphael, suddenly bethinking himself of his talisman and taking it from his pocket.

Whether because exhausted by the struggles of that long day, he no longer had the strength to steer his intellect through the waves of wine and punch, or because, excited to frenzy by the image he had evoked of his life, he had by insensible degrees made himself drunk by the torrent of his words—whatever the reason, Raphael became wild and light-headed, like a man completely bereft of reason.

"To the devil with death!" he cried, brandishing the skin. "Now I propose to live! I am rich, I have all the virtues. Nothing can resist me. Who would not be good when he can do anything?—Aha! oho! I expressed a wish for two hundred thousand francs a year and I shall have them. Salute me, ye swine who wallow on this carpet as if it were a dunghill! You belong to me—a noble property! I am rich, I can buy you all, even the deputy snoring yonder. Come, you riffraff of good society, bless me! I am the Pope!"

At that moment, Raphael's ejaculations, hitherto drowned by the incessant rumble of the snoring, were suddenly heard. Most of the sleepers awoke with an exclamation, they saw the disturber swaying

uncertainly on his legs, and they cursed his drunken brawling with a chorus of oaths.

"Hold your tongues!" cried Raphael. "Dogs, to your kennels!—I have piles of gold, Emile, I will give you Havana cigars."

"I hear you," replied the poet. "*Fœdora or death!* Go ahead! That sugar-plum of a Fœdora deceived you. All women are daughters of Eve. Your story isn't at all dramatic."

"Ah! have you been asleep, sly dog?"

"No—Fœdora or death! I know what you said.

"Wake up!" cried Raphael, striking him with the shagreen as if he were trying to draw an electric current from him.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Emile, rising and seizing Raphael around the waist; "just remember, my friend, that you are in the company of bad women."

"I am a millionaire!"

"Millionaire or not, you are certainly drunk."

"Drunk with power. I can kill you! Silence! I am Nero! I am Nebuchadnezzar!"

"But, Raphael, we are in bad company, and you ought to keep quiet out of dignity."

"My life has been one long, too long, silence. Now I am going to avenge myself on the whole world. I will not amuse myself by squandering paltry five-franc pieces, I will copy, I will represent my epoch by consuming human lives, intellects, souls. That's a sort of luxury not to be sneered at, eh? the opulence of the plague! I will fight with yellow, green, blue fever, with armies, with scaffolds. I can

have Fœdora—but no, I don't want Fœdora, she is my disease, I am dying of Fœdora! I want to forget Fœdora."

"If you keep on shouting, I'll carry you into the dining-room."

"Do you see this piece of skin? it is Solomon's will. Solomon, that little schoolmaster king, is mine! I own Arabia, Petræa too! The whole universe is mine. You are mine if I choose. Ah! if I do choose, beware! I can buy up your old newspaper shop, you shall be my valet. You shall write couplets for me, you shall manage my paper. Valet! *valet*, that means: 'His health is good because he hasn't anything to think about.'"

At that, Emile pulled Raphael into the dining-room.

"Well, yes, my boy," he said, "I am your valet. But you're going to be editor-in-chief of a newspaper, so be quiet! be respectable out of consideration for me! Do you love me?"

"Do I love you! You shall have Havana cigars by means of this skin. Always the skin, my boy, the omnipotent skin! It's an excellent plaster, I can cure corns. Have you any corns? I'll remove them."

"I never saw you so stupid."

"Stupid, my friend? No, no. This skin shrinks when I express a wish—it's an antiphrasis. The Brahmin—there's a Brahmin mixed up in it!—the Brahmin was a wag, for wishes, you see, ought to stretch—"

"Yes, that's so."

"I tell you—"

"Yes, yes, that's very true, I agree with you. A wish stretches—"

"The skin, I said."

"Oh, yes!"

"You don't believe me. I know you, my boy, you lie like a new king."

"How can you expect me to adopt the vagaries of your drunkenness?"

"I'll bet you that I can prove it. Let's measure it."

"Deuce take him, he won't go to sleep," cried Emile, as he saw Raphael prowling around the dining-room.

Valentin, endowed with the cunning of a monkey, thanks to that extraordinary clearness of vision whose phenomena are sometimes sharply contrasted in drunkards with the dull vision of drunkenness, succeeded in finding an inkstand and a napkin, repeating constantly:

"Let's measure it! let's measure it!"

"All right," said Emile, "let's measure it!"

The friends spread out the napkin and placed the skin on top of it. Emile, whose hand seemed to be steadier than Raphael's, traced the outline of the talisman with ink, while his friend said:

"I wished for two hundred thousand francs a year, didn't I? Well, when I get it, you will see how my chagrin will shrink!"*

*A play upon the word *chagrin*, which, in French, in addition to a meaning closely corresponding to the meaning of the same word in English, has the further signification of *shagreen*, in which sense it is used in the French title of this book—La Peau de Chagrin.

"Very well. Now go to sleep. Do you want me to fix you on this couch? There, are you comfortable?"

"Yes, my nursling of the press. You shall amuse me and keep off the flies. A friend in misfortune is entitled to be a friend in prosperity. So I will give you Ha-va-na ci—"

"Come, sleep off your gold, millionaire."

"And you sleep off your articles. Good-night. Say good-night to Nebuchadnezzar! Love! Here's to France, glory and ri-ri-rich—"

The two friends soon joined their snoring to the music that echoed through the salons. A useless concert! The candles burned out one by one and broke their glass *bobèches*. Darkness wrapped in crêpe that long debauch in which Raphael's narrative had been like a debauch of words, of words without ideas, and of ideas which had often failed of expression.

*

The next day, about noon, the fair Aquilina rose, yawning and fatigued, her cheeks streaked by the imprint of the velvet stool upon which her head had rested. Euphrasie, awakened by her companion's movement, straightened herself up abruptly with a hoarse cry; her pretty face, so fresh and white the night before, was yellow and gaunt as that of a girl going to the hospital. Little by little the revellers began to stir uneasily with ominous groans, their arms and legs were stiff, and weariness in a thousand forms assailed them when they awoke. A servant threw open the blinds and windows in the salons. The assembled guests rose, recalled to life by the hot rays of the sun shining on the heads of the sleepers. The restless movements of sleep having shattered the elegant structures upon their heads and disarranged their dresses, the women presented a hideous spectacle in the bright light of day; their hair was hanging in disorder, their faces wore a different expression, their eyes, once so sparkling, were glazed by weariness. The bilious complexions, which looked so well by candle-light, were horrible to see; the lymphatic faces, so white and soft after a proper amount of rest, had turned green; the lips, but now so red and tempting, were colorless and parched, and bore the shameful marks

of drunkenness. The men denied their mistresses of the night, seeing them thus haggard and cadaverous, like flowers that lie trampled in the street after the passage of a procession. But the disdainful men were even more hideous. You would have shuddered to see those human faces, with hollow, black-ringed eyes which seemed to see nothing, benumbed by wine, stupefied by troubled sleep, more fatiguing than restful. Those haggard faces, in which the physical appetites appeared in all their nakedness, without the poetry with which our hearts adorn them, had an indefinable touch of ferocity and unfeeling bestiality. This awakening of Vice, undisguised and unpainted, that ragged skeleton of evil, cold and empty and unsupported by the sophistries of wit or the allurements of luxury, horrified those fearless athletes, accustomed as they were to wrestle with debauchery. Artists and courtesans held their peace as they gazed, wild-eyed, upon the confusion that reigned in the apartments, where everything had been wrecked, laid waste by the fire of passion.

A satanic laugh suddenly arose when Taillefer, hearing the dull muttering of his guests, attempted to salute them with a smile; his perspiring, bloated face caused the image of crime without remorse to hover over that infernal scene.—See *The Red Inn*.—The picture was complete. It was a picture of the most debased life amid luxurious surroundings, a ghastly mixture of pomp and human misery, the awakening from a debauch after it has with its strong hands pressed out the juice from all the fruits of life,

leaving spread about naught but disgusting refuse, and lies in which it no longer believes. You would have said that it was a picture of Death grinning with glee in the midst of a plague-stricken family: no perfumes now, nor dazzling lights, no merriment nor desires; but disgust with its sickening odors and its stinging philosophy, the sun shining as bright as truth itself, and an atmosphere as pure as virtue, contrasted with a hot atmosphere, heavy with miasma, the miasma of a debauch! Despite their familiarity with vice, several of the young women thought of their awakening in the old days, when, pure and innocent creatures, they looked out through their rustic windows, festooned with roses and honeysuckle, upon a lovely landscape, enlivened by the joyous trills of the lark, mistily lighted by the first rays of dawn and fantastically decorated by the dew. Others thought of the family breakfast, the table around which sat the children and the father laughing in innocent mirth, where the dishes were as simple as the hearts of those that partook of them, and where everything breathed an indefinable charm. An artist thought of the peaceful atmosphere of his studio, of his chaste statue, and the graceful model who awaited him there. A young man, remembering the lawsuit on which the fate of his family depended, thought of the important conference which demanded his presence. The scholar regretted his study whither a work of noble purpose summoned him. Almost all reproved themselves. At that moment, Emile, fresh and rosy as the most dapper

salesman in a fashionable shop, made his appearance with a smile on his face.

"You're uglier than tipstaves!" he cried, "you can do nothing to-day, the day is wasted; I am in favor of breakfasting."

Thereupon Taillefer went out to issue orders. The women languidly went to the mirrors to repair the wreck of their toilets. Everyone shook himself. The most vicious lectured the most virtuous. The courtesans laughed at those who seemed to lack strength to continue the wild carousal. In a moment the spectres became animated, formed groups, questioned one another, and smiled. A few active, adroit servants speedily restored the furniture and everything else to its place. A sumptuous breakfast was served. The guests promptly rushed to the dining-room. There, although everything bore the ineffaceable stamp of the orgy of the night before, there was, at all events, a trace of life and thought, as in the last convulsions of a dying man. As in the Mardi Gras procession, revelry was interred by masks exhausted by their dancing, sated with drunkenness, and seeking to convict pleasure of impotence in order to avoid confessing their own.

Just as the intrepid crew approached the capitalist's table, Cardot, who had disappeared the night before after supper, to finish his debauch in bed, showed his officious face over which a gentle smile was playing. He seemed to have had a presentiment of some inheritance to dip his fingers in, to distribute or inventory or engross—an inheritance overflowing with

deeds to be drawn and big with fees, as juicy as the quivering fillet in which the host was just plunging his knife.

"Oho! we're going to breakfast before a notary!" cried De Cursy.

"You come just in time to endorse and docket all these documents," said the banker, pointing to the table.

"There's no will to be made, but I'm not so sure about marriage-contracts," said the scholar, who had been married *de facto* for the first time in a year.

"Oh! oh!"

"Ha! ha!"

"One moment," said Cardot, deafened by a chorus of poor jokes, "I have come here on business of serious importance. I am the bearer of six millions to one of you."—Profound silence.—"Monsieur," he continued, addressing Raphael, who was engaged at that moment in wiping his eyes unceremoniously with a corner of his napkin, "was not your excellent mother a Miss O'Flaharty?"

"Yes," replied Raphael, mechanically, "*Barbe-Marie.*"

"Have you," continued Cardot, "your own certificate of birth and Madame de Valentin's?"

"I have, indeed."

"Very well, monsieur, you are the sole and only heir of Major O'Flaharty, who died in 1828 at Calcutta."

"What *incalcuttable* luck!" cried the carping critic.

"The major having made several bequests in favor of certain public institutions, the French government made a demand upon the East Indian Company for his inheritance," continued the notary. "The estate is settled and the residue ready to be paid over. I had been vainly seeking the representatives of Barbe-Marie O'Flaharty for a fortnight, when yesterday, at this table—"

At that moment, Raphael suddenly arose with the abrupt movement of a man who receives a wound. There was a sort of silent acclamation; the first impulse of the guests was dictated by a sullen envy, all eyes were turned upon him like so many flames. Then a murmur, like that of an angry pit, the uproar of an *émeute* in progress, made itself heard, and everyone said a word in salutation of that vast fortune brought thither by the notary. Restored to full possession of his faculties by this sudden obedience of fate, Raphael at once spread out upon the table the napkin with which he had measured the shagreen skin. Heedless of everything that was said to him, he laid the talisman upon it, and shuddered involuntarily when he saw a little space between the outer edge of the skin and the outline drawn on the linen.

"Why, what's the matter with him?" cried Taillefer, "he gets his fortune cheap."

"*Support him, Châtillon!*" said Bixiou to Emile, "joy is killing him."

A ghastly pallor brought out all the muscles on the new-made heir's haggard face, his features

contracted, the protruding portions of his face turned white, the hollows darkened, the mask was livid and the eyes were fixed. He saw DEATH. That pompous banker, surrounded by faded courtesans and surfeited faces, that death-agony of pleasure was a living image of his life. Raphael looked three times at the talisman which had room to move around within the pitiless lines marked on the napkin: he tried to doubt, but a vivid presentiment put his incredulity to flight. The world belonged to him, he could do anything, and he wanted nothing more. Like a traveller in the middle of the desert, he had a little water to quench his thirst, and he must measure out his life by the number of swallows. He saw how many days each wish was to cost him. At last he believed in the bit of shagreen, he listened to his own breathing, he felt ill already, and he asked himself:

"Am I not consumptive? Didn't my mother die of some lung disease?"

"Ah! Raphael, you are going to have a good time! What will you give me?" said Aquilina.

"Let's drink to the death of his uncle, Major O'Flaharty! There was a man!"

"He will be a peer of France."

"Bah! what does a peer of France amount to since July?" said the critic.

"Will you take a box at the Bouffons?"

"I hope you'll treat us all?" said Bixiou.

"A man like him knows how to do things handsomely," said Emile.

The outcries of that laughing crowd rang in Valentin's ears, but he did not grasp the meaning of a single word; he was thinking vaguely of the mechanical, unaspiring life of the Bretagne peasant, overburdened with children, ploughing his field, living on buckwheat, drinking cider out of his jug, believing in the Virgin and the king, partaking of communion at Easter, dancing on the greensward on Sundays, and unable to understand his pastor's sermon. The spectacle before his eyes at that moment, the gilt hangings, the prostitutes, the sumptuous repast, the splendor, took him by the throat and made him cough.

"Do you wish for some asparagus?" the banker asked him.

"*I wish for nothing!*" replied Raphael in a voice of thunder.

"Bravo!" retorted Taillefer. "You understand wealth, it's a patent of impertinence. You are one of us!—Messieurs, let us drink to the power of gold. Monsieur de Valentin, six times a millionaire, has come into power. He is king, he can do what he chooses; he is above everything, as all rich men are. To him, henceforth, the expression: ALL FRENCHMEN ARE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW, is a lie inscribed at the head of the charter. He will not obey the laws, the laws will obey him. There is no scaffold, no headsman, for millionaires!"

"Yes, there is," replied Raphael, "they are their own headsmen!"

"Another prejudice!" cried the banker.

"Let us take a drink!" said Raphael, putting the talisman in his pocket.

"What are you doing?" said Emile, arresting his hand.—"Messieurs," he added, addressing the company, who were much surprised by Raphael's conduct, "understand that our friend De Valentin—what am I saying? MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS DE VALENTIN—possesses a secret for making fortunes. His wishes are gratified the moment that he formulates them. Unless he wants to be looked upon as a lackey, a man without heart, he will enrich us all."

"Ah! my little Raphael, I want a set of pearls," cried Euphrasie.

"If he has any such thing as gratitude, he'll give me two carriages and some fast horses!" said Aquilina.

"Wish for a hundred thousand a year for me!"

"Silk dresses!"

"Pay my debts!"

"Give my uncle a stroke of apoplexy, the old curmudgeon!"

"Raphael, I'll let you off for ten thousand a year."

"A fine lot of gifts!" cried the notary.

"He ought to cure me of the gout!"

"Send down the price of consols!" cried the banker.

These sentences were discharged like the shower of golden fire that terminates a pyrotechnic display. All these frantic wishes were uttered more in earnest than in jest, perhaps.

"My dear friend," said Emile, seriously, "I will be content with an income of two hundred thousand francs; come, do your duty with a good grace!"

"Emile," said Raphael, "don't you know what it will cost me?"

"A fine excuse!" cried the poet. "Oughtn't we to sacrifice ourselves for our friends?"

"I have a strong inclination to wish for the death of every one of you," retorted Valentin, casting a dark, searching glance upon the guests.

"Dying men are fearfully cruel," laughed Emile. "You are a rich man," he added in a serious tone, "and I won't give you as much as two months to become disgustingly selfish. You are stupid already, for you can't understand a joke. All you lack now is to believe in your shagreen skin."

Raphael, dreading the ridicule of the company, made no reply, drank immoderately, and got drunk in order to forget for a moment his ill-omened power.

III

THE AGONY

*

Early in the month of December, an old man of seventy years or more walked along Rue de Varenne, despite the falling rain, scrutinizing the door of every house in search of Monsieur le Marquis Raphael de Valentin's number, with the artlessness of a child and the abstracted air of a philosopher. Traces of a fierce battle between bitter grief and a despotic character were clearly marked upon that face, framed by long, dishevelled gray hair and as dry and withered as a piece of old parchment curling in the fire. If a painter had chanced to meet that strange individual, thin and bony, and dressed in black, he would certainly, on his return to his studio, have sketched him in his album and have written beneath the sketch: *A classic poet in quest of a rhyme.* Having discovered at last the number that had been given him, that living palingenesis of Rollin knocked gently at the door of a magnificent mansion.

"Is Monsieur Raphael in?" the goodman inquired of a servant in livery.

"Monsieur le Marquis receives no one," replied the servant, swallowing an enormous piece of bread which he took from a large bowl of coffee.

"His carriage is here," replied the aged stranger, pointing to a handsome equipage standing under the wooden awning which took the place of the ordinary awning of canvas, and by which the steps leading to the front door were sheltered. "He is going out, I will wait for him."

"Ah! old gentleman, you might have to stay here till to-morrow morning," replied the servant. "There's always a carriage ready for monsieur. But I beg you to go away; I should lose an annuity of six hundred francs if, without an order, I should once let anybody in who is a stranger to the house."

At that moment, a tall old man, whose costume much resembled that of an usher in one of the government departments, came out of the vestibule and ran hastily down two or three steps, scrutinizing the astonished old petitioner.

"At all events, here's Monsieur Jonathas," said the porter; "speak to him."

The two old men, attracted toward each other by sympathy or mutual curiosity, met in the centre of the spacious courtyard, at a circle where tufts of grass were growing between the paving-stones. A ghastly silence prevailed in the hôtel. One's first thought, upon seeing Jonathas, would have been a desire to solve the mystery which hovered about his face, and to which the most trifling things in that gloomy house pointed. Raphael's first care, upon receiving his uncle's immense property, had been to seek out the faithful old servant upon whose attachment he knew that he could rely. Jonathas wept

with joy to see his young master, to whom he believed that he had said farewell forever; but nothing could equal his delight when the marquis promoted him to the exalted station of steward. Old Jonathas became an intermediary power between Raphael and the whole world. Having absolute control of his master's wealth, the blind executor of an unknown purpose, he was, as it were, a sixth sense through which the emotions of life reached Raphael.

"I wish to speak with Monsieur Raphael, monsieur," said the old man to Jonathas, going up two or three steps to obtain shelter from the rain.

"To speak with monsieur le marquis?" cried the steward. "Why, he barely speaks to me, his foster-father!"

"But I, too, am his foster-father," cried the old man. "Your wife may have nursed him, but I myself held him at the breast of the Muses. He is my foster-child, my son, *carus alumnus!* I shaped his brain, cultivated his understanding, developed his genius, and, I am not afraid to say, to my honor and glory. Isn't he one of the most remarkable men of our epoch? I had him under me in the sixth form, in the third and in rhetoric. I am his teacher."

"Ah! you are Monsieur Porriquet?"

"Exactly. But, monsieur—"

"Hush! hush!" said Jonathas to two scullions whose voices broke the monastic silence in which the house was wrapped.

"But, monsieur," continued the pedagogue, "is monsieur le marquis ill?"

"My dear monsieur," Jonathas replied, "God only knows what the matter is with my master. You see there aren't two houses in Paris like ours. Not two houses, do you hear? Faith, it's true. Monsieur le marquis bought this house, which used to belong to a duke and peer. He spent three hundred thousand francs to furnish it. A handy little sum, three hundred thousand francs! But every room in our house is a regular miracle. 'Good!' I says to myself on seeing all that magnificence, 'this is the way it used to be in the days of monsieur his grandfather; the young marquis is going to receive city and court!' Not at all. Monsieur refused to see anyone. He leads a devil of a life, Monsieur Porriquet, do you understand? an *incompatible* life. Monsieur gets up every day at the same time. I'm the only one, you see, who can go into his room—nobody but me. I open the door at seven o'clock, summer and winter. That's a strange bargain we made. When I'm in the room, I say:

"'Monsieur le marquis, you must wake up and dress.'

"He wakes up and dresses himself. I have to hand him his dressing-gown, always made of the same cloth and in the same way. I have to get a new one when the old one's worn out, just to save him the trouble of asking for a new one. There's an idea! However, he has a thousand francs a day to spend, so he does what he likes, the dear child. Besides, I'm so fond of him that if he was to strike me on the right cheek I'd offer him the left! If he

should tell me to do the most difficult things, I'd do them just the same, you understand. However, he has given me so many little things to do that I have enough to keep me busy. He reads the papers, I tell you! My orders are to put them in the same place, on the same table. I have to go at the same time every day, too, to shave him, and my hand mustn't tremble. The cook would lose the annuity of a thousand francs that's waiting for him after monsieur's death, if breakfast wasn't served and in front of monsieur *incompatibly* at ten o'clock every morning, and dinner at just five. The menu is arranged for the whole year, day by day. Monsieur le marquis doesn't have to express a wish for anything. He has strawberries when there are any strawberries, and he eats the first mackerel that arrives in Paris. The bill of fare is printed, and he knows his dinner by heart in the morning. He dresses for dinner at the same hour, in the same clothes, the same linen, always laid out by me, you understand, on the same chair. I have to see to it that his clothes are always made of the same cloth; in case of need, if his overcoat should go to pieces,—a mere supposition,—I must replace it without saying a word to him. If it's a fine day, I go in and say to my master:

"'Aren't you going out, monsieur?'

"He answers yes or no. If he takes it into his head to drive, he doesn't wait for his horses, they're always harnessed: the coachman sits *incompatibly* on his box, whip in hand, just as you see him. In the evening, after dinner, Monsieur goes to the Opéra one

day and the next to the Ital—but no, he hasn't been to the Italiens yet, I couldn't get him a box till yesterday. Then he comes in at exactly eleven o'clock and goes to bed. During the day when he hasn't anything to do, he reads, reads all the time! Don't you see! that's a whim of his! I have orders to read the *Publishers' Journal* to him, and buy the new books, so that he can find them on his table the very day they're issued. My orders are to go into his room every hour, to look after the fire and everything else, and see that he has everything he wants. He gave me a little book to learn by heart, monsieur, with all my duties written down in it—a regular catechism! In summer I have to keep his room at the same degree of temperature, with blocks of ice, and to put fresh flowers all about in all weathers. He's rich! he has a thousand francs a day to spend, he can gratify his whims. He was deprived of the necessaries of life long enough, poor child! He doesn't bother anybody, he's as good as good bread, he never says a word, if you'll believe it—absolute silence in the house and garden! In fact, my master doesn't have to wish for a single thing, everything's done by finger and eye, and *on the second!* And he is right; if you don't make your servants toe the mark, everything goes to the deuce. I tell him everything he has to do and he listens to me. You wouldn't believe how far he's carried the thing. His apartments are *en—en*—what do you call it?—*en suite*. Well, he opens the door of his bedroom, say, or his study, and crack! all the other doors open themselves

by machinery. So that he can go from one end of his house to the other without finding a single door closed. It's very pretty and convenient, and very pleasant for us! But it cost a pretty penny, I promise you!—Last of all, Monsieur Porriquet, he said to me:

"'Jonathas, you must take care of me as if I was a child in swaddling-clothes.'

"Yes, monsieur, in swaddling-clothes, that's what he said!

"'You must think of my wants for me.'

"I am the master, d'ye see, and he's the servant, as you might say. Why is it? Ah! that's what no one on earth knows except himself and the good Lord. It's *incompatible!*"

"He's writing a poem!" cried the old professor.

"Do you believe he's writing a poem, monsieur? That must be very absorbing work, then! But I don't think it, you see. He often says to me that he wants to live like the *vergetation*, to *vergetate*. And no later than yesterday, Monsieur Porriquet, he was looking at a tulip when he was dressing, and he says:

"'That's my life—I'm *vergetating*, my poor Jonathas!'

"And now, do you know, some other people will have it he's a *monomaniac*. It's *incompatible!*"

"It all goes to convince me, Jonathas," rejoined the professor, with a magisterial gravity which aroused the profound respect of the old valet, "that your master is engaged upon a great work. He is plunged in profound meditation, and does not wish

to be diverted therefrom by the petty annoyances of everyday life. In the absorption of his intellectual labors a man of genius forgets everything. One day, the illustrious Newton—"

"Who? Newton?" said Jonathas. "I don't know him."

"Newton, a great mathematician," continued Porriquet, "sat for twenty-four hours with his elbows resting on a table; when he came out of his reverie, he thought that it was still the day before, just as if he had been asleep.—I will go up and see him, the dear boy, I may be able to help him."

"One moment!" exclaimed Jonathas. "If you were the King of France, old man, just understand that you wouldn't enter this house without breaking in the doors and walking over my body. But I'll run and tell him you're here, Monsieur Porriquet, and I'll ask him like this: 'Must I bring him up?' He'll say yes or no. I never say to him: *Do you want?* or *do you wish?* or *would you like?* Those words are struck out of our language. Once I happened to use one of them. 'Do you want to kill me?' he shouted at me in a rage."

Jonathas left the old man in the vestibule, motioning to him to come no farther; but he soon returned with a favorable reply, and led the old pedagogue through a series of splendid apartments of which all the doors were open. From afar, Porriquet espied his former pupil sitting in front of a fire. Enveloped in a dressing-gown with a large-figured material and buried in an easy-chair hung on springs, Raphael

was reading a newspaper. The excessive melancholy by which he seemed to be possessed was indicated by the languid attitude of his body; it was depicted on his forehead, on his face, pale as a faded flower. A sort of effeminate beauty and the peculiarities characteristic of wealthy invalids distinguished his appearance. His hands had the soft, delicate whiteness of a pretty woman's. His fair hair, now somewhat thin, was curled about his temples with studied coquetry. A Greek cap, drawn down by a tassel too heavy for the light silk of which it was made, hung over the side of his face. He had dropped at his feet the paper-knife with a malachite handle set in gold, which he had been using to cut the leaves of a book. On his knee was the amber mouthpiece of a superb Indian hookah, whose enamelled coils lay like a snake on the floor, and he forgot to inhale its fragrant smoke. But the general air of debility that pervaded his youthful body was contradicted by a pair of blue eyes to which all his life seemed to have withdrawn, and in which shone an extraordinary emotion which impressed everyone at first glance. That expression was unpleasant to behold. Some might read despair therein; others might detect the signs of an internal struggle as terrible as remorse. It was the profound expression of the helpless man who forces his desires back into the depths of his heart, or of the miser enjoying in imagination all the pleasures his money might afford him but denying himself in order not to lessen his hoard; or the expression of Prometheus

bound, of the dethroned Napoléon, who, when he learned at the Elysée, in 1815, of the strategic blunder committed by his enemies, prayed for the supreme command for twenty-four hours and was refused. The expression of a conqueror and a doomed man! better than all, the expression with which Raphael himself, a few months before, had looked at the Seine, or at his last gold piece as he ventured it at play. He placed his will, his intelligence, in subjection to the coarse good sense of an old peasant, hardly civilized by a half-century of domestic service. Almost happy at becoming a sort of automaton, he renounced life in order to live, and stripped his mind of all the poetry of desire. In order to contend more successfully with the relentless power whose challenge he had accepted, he had become chaste after the manner of Origen by emasculating his imagination.

On the day following that on which, when he was unexpectedly enriched by his uncle's will, he had seen the bit of shagreen shrink, he had called upon his notary. There, a physician of much repute had described in all seriousness, over the dessert, the way in which a Swiss had cured himself of consumption. The man had not spoken a word for ten years, and had forced himself to breathe only six times a minute in the heavy atmosphere of a cow-barn, following meanwhile a very mild system of dieting. "I will imitate that man!" said Raphael to himself, for he was determined to live, at any price. Amid the most luxurious surroundings, he had led the life of a steam-engine.

When the old professor looked at the corpse-like youth, he shuddered; every part of that slender, weakly body seemed to him artificial. In the young marquis with the devouring eye, with the thought-laden brow, he could not recognize the pupil with fresh, rosy complexion and lusty youthful limbs whom he remembered so well. If the worthy classicist, a sagacious critic and conservator of the classic style, had read Lord Byron, he would have believed that Manfred was before him where Childe Harold should have been.

"Good-morning, Père Porriquet," said Raphael, pressing the old man's icy fingers in his moist, burning hand. "How are you?"

"Oh! I am very well," replied the old man, terrified by the touch of that feverish palm. "And you?"

"Oh! I hope to keep myself in good health."

"You are engaged upon some great work, I doubt not?"

"No," replied Raphael. "*Exegi monumentum*, Père Porriquet; I have finished one great work and I have said farewell to science. Indeed, I hardly know where my manuscript is."

"The style is pure, of course?" said the professor. "You have not, I trust, adopted the barbarous language of this new school which fancies that it is doing a marvellous thing in inventing Ronsard!"

"My work is a purely physiological one."

"Oh! that is all that is necessary," rejoined the professor. "In the sciences, grammar must yield

to the demands of new discoveries. Nevertheless, my child, a clear, harmonious style, the language of Massillon, of Monsieur de Buffon, of the great Racine, a classical style, in short, can do no harm.—But, my friend," said the professor, interrupting himself, "I am forgetting the purpose of my visit. It is a selfish purpose."

Remembering too late the refined verbosity and eloquent periphrases to which long experience as a teacher had accustomed his master, Raphael almost repented having received him; but just as he was about to express a desire that he should go, he hastily suppressed it, casting a furtive glance at the magic skin which hung on the wall in front of him against a white material whereon its fateful outlines were carefully traced by a red line which enclosed it exactly. Since the fatal debauch, Raphael had conquered even his most trivial caprices and lived in such a way as not to give that redoubtable talisman the slightest disturbance. The shagreen was like a tiger with whom he was obliged to live without arousing his ferocious instincts. So he listened patiently to the old professor's circumlocutions.

Père Porriquet spent an hour describing the persecution to which he had been subjected since the Revolution of July. The goodman, desiring a strong government, had voiced the patriotic theory that the grocers should be relegated to their shops, lawyers to the Palais de Justice, peers of France to the Luxembourg, and statesmen to the management of public affairs; but one of the citizen-king's popular

ministers had deprived him of his professorship, charging him with being a Carlist. The old man found himself without employment, without a pension, and without bread. As he was the Providence of a poor nephew whose board he had been paying at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, he had come, less in his own interest than in that of his adopted child, to beg his former pupil to request from the new minister, not his reinstatement, but the post of principal in some provincial college. Raphael was almost overcome by sleep when the good man's monotonous voice ceased to ring in his ears. Being compelled by courtesy to meet the white, almost motionless eyes of the slow-spoken, droning old man, he had been stupefied, mesmerized, by an indescribable inert force.

"Well, my dear Père Porriquet," he replied, without any very clear idea of what question he was replying to, "I can do nothing, nothing at all. *I most sincerely wish* that you may succeed—"

At that moment, without noticing the effect that those selfish, carelessly-uttered, commonplace words produced upon the old man's yellow, wrinkled face, Raphael jumped to his feet like a frightened deer. He saw a narrow line of white between the edge of the black skin and the red line; he uttered such a terrible cry that the poor professor was frightened beyond measure.

"Begone, you old fool!" he shouted, "you will get your appointment as principal! Why couldn't you have asked me for an annuity of a thousand

crowns, instead of a homicidal wish like that? Then your visit would have cost me nothing. There are a hundred thousand offices in France and I have but one life! A man's life is worth more than all the offices in the world.—Jonathas!"

Jonathas appeared.

"This is your work, you triple idiot! Why did you suggest my receiving monsieur?" he said, pointing to the petrified old man. "Did I put my soul into your hands to be torn to pieces? You have taken ten years of my life from me at this moment! Another mistake like this and you'll take me to the place to which I took my father. Wouldn't I have preferred to possess the fair Fœdora instead of obliging this old carcass, this human rag? I have money to give him.—Besides, suppose all the Porriquets on earth should die of hunger, what is it to me?"

Wrath had turned Raphael's face white; a light foam appeared on his trembling lips and his eyes were bloodshot and threatening. The two old men were seized with a convulsive trembling at the sight, like children in presence of a serpent. The young man fell back into his chair; a sort of reaction took place within him, and tears flowed abundantly from his flashing eyes.

"Oh! my life! my beautiful life!" he exclaimed. "Farewell to benevolent thoughts! farewell to love! farewell to everything!"

He turned to the professor.

"The harm is done, my old friend," he continued, in a gentle voice. "I shall have rewarded you

handsomely for your trouble; and my misfortune will at all events have benefited an excellent and worthy man."

There was so much deep feeling in the tone in which those almost unintelligible words were uttered, that the two old men wept as one weeps upon hearing some moving air sung in a strange language.

"He is epileptic!" said Porriquet, in an undertone.

"I recognize your kindness of heart, my friend," rejoined Raphael, gently, "you seek to excuse me. Disease is an accident, inhumanity would be a vice.—Leave me now," he added. "To-morrow or the day after, perhaps to-night, you will receive your appointment, for *resistance* has triumphed over *movement*. Adieu!"

The old man withdrew, horrified beyond measure and keenly anxious concerning Valentin's mental soundness. There was to his mind something supernatural in the scene. He doubted the evidence of his own senses and questioned himself as if he had just waked from a painful dream.

"Hark ye, Jonathas," said the young man to his old servant. "Try to understand the mission I have entrusted to you."

"Yes, monsieur le marquis."

"I am a man to whom the ordinary laws of life do not apply."

"Yes, monsieur le marquis."

"All the joys of life play around my death-bed and dance in front of me like beautiful women; if I beckon

to them, I die. Always death! You must be a barrier between the world and me."

"Yes, monsieur le marquis," said the old valet, wiping away the perspiration that stood upon his wrinkled brow. "But, if you don't want to see beautiful women, what will you do at the Italiens this evening? An English family returning to London let me have the balance of their subscription, and you have a fine box—yes, a magnificent box, in the first tier."

Raphael had fallen into a deep reverie and was not listening.

Do you see that sumptuous carriage, that brown coupé of simple exterior, upon whose panels shines the crest of an ancient and noble family? When that coupé rolls swiftly by, grisettes gaze at it admiringly, envy the yellow satin, the carpet from La Savonnerie, the lace curtains, as fresh and cool as rice-straw, the soft cushions and the silent mirrors. Two servants in livery are perched behind that aristocratic equipage; but inside, against the silk lining, lies a burning face with dark circles around the eyes, Raphael's face, melancholy and pensive. Fatal image of wealth! He rushes through Paris like a bomb-shell, stops at the porch of the Théâtre Favart, the step is lowered, his two valets help him to alight, an envious crowd stares at him.

"What did that fellow ever do, to be so rich?" says a poor law-student, who, for want of three francs, was unable to listen to Rossini's magic chords.

Raphael walked slowly through the corridors of the theatre; he did not anticipate any pleasure from the entertainment he had once longed for so eagerly. While waiting for the second act of *Semiramide* to begin, he walked back and forth in the foyer, wandered through the galleries, regardless of his box, which he had not yet entered. The idea of property had already ceased to exist in his heart. Like all invalids, he thought of nothing but his disease. Leaning against the mantel of the fireplace, round about which and in the middle of the foyer were a multitude of dandies old and young, ministers and ex-ministers, peers without peerages and peerages without peers, as produced by the Revolution of July,—in a word, a whole world of speculators and journalists,—Raphael saw, a few steps away, among the innumerable faces, a strange, uncanny face. He walked forward, winking insolently, toward that extraordinary being, in order to scrutinize him at closer quarters. "What admirable painting!" he said to himself. The eyebrows, the hair, the tuft *à la Mazarin* on the chin, which the unknown proudly displayed, were dyed black; but, being applied upon hair that was evidently too white, the cosmetic had produced an unnatural, purplish tint, which varied according to the greater or less brilliancy of the light. His narrow, flat face, the wrinkles in which were filled with thick layers of red and white paint, expressed cunning and disquietude at once. That decoration was wanting on some portions of the face and caused his decrepitude and his natural leaden hue

to appear with startling distinctness; so that it was almost impossible to refrain from laughing at sight of that face with its pointed chin and protruding forehead, by no means unlike the grotesque wooden faces carved by German shepherds in their leisure hours. Upon examining that ancient Adonis and Raphael one after the other, a close observer would have fancied that he could detect in the marquis a young man's eyes beneath the mask of an old man, and in the unknown an old man's lustreless eyes beneath a youthful mask.

Valentin strove to remember under what circumstances he had previously met that little wizened old man, booted and cravatted in the latest style, who jangled his spurs and folded his arms as if he had all the energy of impatient youth to expend. There was nothing constrained or artificial in his gait. His stylish coat, carefully buttoned, covered a sturdy, old-fashioned frame, giving him the aspect of a venerable fop who still follows the fashion. That species of animated puppet had for Raphael all the fascination of a ghost; and he gazed at him as he might have gazed at an old smoke-begrimed Rembrandt, recently restored and varnished and put in a new frame. That comparison placed him on the track of the truth in his confused recollections: he recognized the dealer in curiosities, the man to whom he owed his misfortune. At that moment, the fantastic individual indulged in a burst of silent laughter, which manifested itself upon his colorless lips, tightly stretched over a set of false teeth. At that laugh,

Raphael's vivid imagination suggested a strange resemblance between the man's face and the ideal face that painters have given to Goethe's Mephistopheles. A multitude of superstitious ideas took possession of Raphael's powerful mind, he believed in the power of the devil, in all the instances of witchcraft narrated in the legends of the Middle Ages and elaborated by poets. Recoiling in horror from the fate of Faust, he suddenly invoked Heaven, having, like all men in the shadow of death, fervent faith in God and the Virgin Mary. A clear, radiant light enabled him to descry the heaven of Michel Angelo and Sanzio Urbino: clouds, a white-bearded old man, winged heads, a lovely woman seated in a halo. Now he understood, he adopted those marvellous creations, whose fanciful, almost human details explained his adventure and permitted him still to hope.

But, when his eyes returned to the foyer of the Italiens, he saw, instead of the Virgin, a girl of ravishing beauty, the odious Euphrasie, the dancer, supple of body and light of foot, who, arrayed in a brilliant costume and covered with oriental pearls, arrived upon the scene, in a pet with her impatient old lover, and exhibited herself, with brow of brass and sparkling eyes, to that curious, envious crowd, as an ocular demonstration of the boundless wealth of the tradesman whose hoard she was squandering. Raphael bethought himself of the jesting wish with which he had received the old man's fatal gift and he tasted all the joys of vengeance as he witnessed

the profound degradation of that sublime virtue, whose fall had then seemed impossible to him. The centenarian's ghastly smile was addressed to Euphrasie, who replied with a loving word; he offered his withered arm, walked two or three times around the foyer, drank in with ecstasy the passionate glances and the complimentary remarks tossed by the crowd to his mistress, unconscious of the contemptuous laughter, the biting sarcasms which were aimed at him.

"In what cemetery did yonder young ghoul dig up that corpse?" cried the most elegant of all the romanticists.

Euphrasie smiled. The scoffer was a slender young man, with fair hair, bright blue eyes, and a moustache; he wore a short frock-coat, his hat was tilted over his ear, he was quick at repartee and familiar with all the jargon of his species.

"How many old men," said Raphael to himself, "crown a life of probity, of toil, and virtue by an outbreak of folly! That old fellow has cold feet and makes love!—Well, monsieur," he exclaimed, detaining the dealer in curiosities and glancing askance at Euphrasie, "have you forgotten the stern maxims of your philosophy?"

"Ah!" replied the dealer, in a voice that was already cracked, "I am as happy as a young man now. I took life backward. There's a whole life in one hour of love."

At that moment, the loungers heard the recall-bell and left the foyer to resume their seats. Raphael

and the old man parted. On entering his box, the marquis spied Fœdora on the other side of the theatre, precisely opposite to him. She had evidently just arrived, and she threw back her cloak, uncovered her neck, and went through the indescribable little manœuvres of a coquette assuming her pose; all eyes were concentrated upon her. A young peer of France was in attendance upon her; she asked him for the opera-glass she had given him to carry. By her manner, by her way of looking at this new partner, Raphael divined the tyranny his successor was undergoing. Fascinated, doubtless, as he had once been, made a dupe as he had been, struggling as he had done with all the power of true love against that woman's cold scheming, the young man was destined to suffer the torments that he, Valentin, had forsworn. An expression of indescribable joy lighted up Fœdora's face when, after she had turned her glass upon all the boxes and made a rapid examination of the toilets, she was conscious that her attire and beauty eclipsed the prettiest and most stylish women in Paris; she laughed to show her white teeth, moved her flower-bedecked head to attract admiration; her glance wandered from box to box, sneering at the awkwardly adjusted head-dress of a Russian princess or at a hideous hat that was horribly unbecoming to a banker's daughter.

Suddenly she turned pale as she encountered Raphael's fixed gaze; her disdained lover overwhelmed her by an intolerable glance of disdain. No other of her dismissed lovers denied her power,

Valentin alone was beyond the reach of her seductions. A power defied with impunity is near its end. That maxim is engraved more deeply in a woman's heart than in the brains of kings. Thus Fœdora saw in Raphael the death of her prestige and her coquetry. A remark made by him the night before at the Opéra had already become famous in the salons of Paris. The sharp point of that terrible epigram had inflicted an incurable wound on the countess. In France we know how to cauterize a wound, but we have not yet discovered any remedy for the injury caused by a remark. At the moment when all the women were looking alternately at the marquis and the countess, Fœdora would have liked to bury him in the dungeons of some Bastille, for, notwithstanding her talent for dissimulation, her rivals divined her suffering.

And finally her last consolation was taken from her. Those delightful words: "I am the fairest!" that everlasting phrase which soothed all the sorrows of her vanity, became a lie. At the beginning of the second act, a woman took her place near Raphael, in a box which had thus far remained empty. The whole pit uttered a murmur of admiration. That sea of human faces set its intelligent waves in motion, and all eyes were fixed on the stranger. Young and old united in an uproar so prolonged, that, while the curtain was rising, the musicians of the orchestra turned about to demand silence; but they, too, joined in the applause and swelled the confused roar. Lively conversations began in every box. The

women were all armed with their glasses, the rejuvenated old rakes cleaned their lenses with their kid gloves. The excitement gradually subsided, the singing on the stage became audible, order was completely restored. The better class of spectators, ashamed of having yielded to a natural impulse, resumed their aristocratic coldness and polish of manner. The rich do not choose to marvel at anything, they should be able to detect at first sight of a beautiful work the defects which will enable them to dispense with admiration—a vulgar sentiment. A few men, however, remained absorbed in artless ecstasy, not listening to the music but gazing at Raphael's neighbor. In a box on the lower tier, Valentin spied the bloated, ignoble face of Taillefer, who bestowed an approving grimace upon him; Aquilina was beside him. Then he saw Emile, who was standing up in the orchestra and seemed to say to him: "Why, look at the lovely creature close beside you!" Rastignac, too, in attendance upon Madame de Nucingen and her daughter, was twisting his gloves like a man in despair at being chained there, unable to approach the fair unknown.

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Raphael's life depended on a compact, as yet unbroken, which he had made with himself; he had promised himself never to look closely at any woman, and, to keep himself out of reach of temptation, he wore an eye-glass whose microscopic lens was artfully inserted in such way as to destroy the harmony of the loveliest features and make them hideous. Still under the spell of the terror that had seized him in the morning, when, upon his giving utterance to a simple, courteous phrase, the talisman had so quickly contracted, Raphael sternly resolved not to turn toward his neighbor. Seated like a duchess, with his back turned toward the corner of his box, he impertinently cut off the stranger's view of half the stage, as if he despised her, as if, indeed, he had no idea that a pretty woman was sitting behind him. His neighbor imitated his attitude exactly; she rested her elbow on the rail of the box, and turned her head three-quarters around, looking at the singers, as if she were posing for a painter. The two resembled two lovers who have fallen out and sulk and turn their backs to each other, ready to embrace at the first word of love. At times the stranger's waving feather or her hair touched Raphael's head, causing a most pleasurable sensation against which he struggled bravely; soon he felt the soft touch of the frills of lace with which her dress

was trimmed, the dress itself made a soft feminine murmuring with its folds, a shuddering sound overflowing with sweet witchery; in short, the imperceptible movement imparted by the respiration to the breast, the back, the garments of the pretty creature, all her sweet animation was suddenly communicated to Raphael as by an electric spark; the tulle and the lace faithfully transmitted to his shoulder the delicious warmth of that bare, white back. By a caprice of nature, those two beings, separated by good breeding and by the abyss of death, breathed in unison, perhaps were thinking of each other. The penetrating perfumes of aloes completed Raphael's intoxication. His imagination, kindled by an obstacle and made even more fantastic by the fetters he imposed upon it, swiftly sketched a woman in lines of fire. He turned sharply around. Embarrassed, doubtless, to find herself touching a stranger, the unknown made a similar movement; their faces, animated by the same thought, confronted each other.

"Pauline!"

"Monsieur Raphael!"

Petrified both, they gazed at each other for a moment in silence. Raphael saw that Pauline was simply and tastefully dressed. Through the gauze that chastely covered her breast, skilful eyes might perceive the whiteness of a lily, and divine outlines which a woman would have admired. And withal, the same maidenly modesty, celestial innocence, and graceful bearing. Her cloak betrayed the trembling

that made the body palpitate in unison with the heart.

"Oh, come to-morrow," she said; "come to the Hôtel de Saint-Quentin and get your papers. I will be there at noon. Be prompt."

She rose hurriedly and disappeared. Raphael started to follow her, but he feared to compromise her, so he remained in his seat, looked at Fœdora and thought her ugly; but, as he could not understand a single measure of the music, and was stifling in the theatre, his heart being so full, he went out and returned home.

"Jonathas," he said to his old servant when he was in bed, "give me half a drop of laudanum on a lump of sugar, and don't wake me to-morrow until twenty minutes to twelve.—I want Pauline to love me!" he cried, the next morning, watching the talisman with indescribable dread.

The skin made no movement, it seemed to have lost its power of contraction, it evidently could not gratify a desire that was already gratified.

"Ah!" cried Raphael, feeling as if he were delivered of a mantle of lead that he had worn ever since the day the talisman was given him, "you lie, you do not obey me, the compact is broken! I am free, I shall live. Was it only a bad joke, after all?"

Even while he was speaking, he did not dare believe his own thought. He dressed himself as simply as in the old days, and determined to go on foot to his former abode, trying to carry himself back in thought to those happy times when he abandoned

himself without fear to the fury of his desires, when he had not as yet passed sentence upon all human enjoyments. As he walked along, he saw, not the Pauline of the Hôtel de Saint-Quentin, but the Pauline of the preceding night—the accomplished mistress of whom he had so often dreamed, a bright, intelligent girl, of a loving disposition, artistic, able to understand the poets and poetry, and living in luxury; in a word, Fœdora, endowed with a lovely mind, or Pauline a countess and twice a millionaire, as Fœdora was. When he found himself upon the well-worn threshold, upon the broken tiling of the porch where he had so many times been assailed by thoughts of despair, an old woman came from the hall and said to him:

"Aren't you Monsieur Raphael de Valentin?"

"Yes, my good woman," he replied.

"You know your old room," said she, "someone is waiting for you there."

"Does Madame Gaudin still keep this house?" asked Raphael.

"Oh! no, monsieur. Madame Gaudin is a baroness now. She lives in a fine house of her own on the other side of the water. Her husband has come back. Why, he's brought back hundreds and thousands. They say she could buy the whole Saint-Jacques quarter if she wanted to.—She gave me her business and the balance of her lease for nothing. Ah! she's a good woman, I tell you! She isn't any prouder to-day than she ever was."

Raphael ran rapidly up to his garret, and when he

reached the last few steps of the stairway, he heard the piano. Pauline was there, modestly clad in a cambric dress; but the cut of the dress, the gloves, the hat, the shawl, which were tossed carelessly on the bed, told the whole story of wealth.

"Ah! here you are at last!" cried Pauline, turning her head with a movement of artless joy.

Raphael took his seat beside her, blushing, shamefaced, happy; he looked at her without speaking.

"Why did you leave us?" she continued, lowering her eyes as a blush mounted to her cheeks. "What became of you?"

"Ah! Pauline, I have been very unhappy and am still!"

"Alas!" she exclaimed, deeply moved. "I guessed your fate last night when I saw you, well-dressed, apparently rich, but really— Ah! Monsieur Raphael, is it still the same as it used to be?"

Valentin could not restrain the tears that gathered in his eyes.

"Pauline," he cried, "I—"

He did not finish; his eyes shone with love and his heart overflowed in his glance.

"Oh! he loves me! he loves me!" cried Pauline.

Raphael nodded his head, for he felt unable to utter a single word. At that gesture, the girl took his hand, pressed it, and said, half laughing, half sobbing:

"Rich, rich, happy, rich! your Pauline is rich.— But I ought to be very poor to-day. A thousand times I have said that I would give all the treasure

on earth for those words: *he loves me!* O my Raphael! I have millions. You love luxury and you shall be content; but you must love my heart, too, there is so much love in it for you! You do not know that my father has returned? I am a rich heiress. My mother and he allow me to do just as I please; I am free, do you hear?"

Raphael, in a sort of delirium, held Pauline's hands and kissed them so ardently and greedily that his kiss resembled a convulsion. Pauline withdrew her hands, placed them on Raphael's shoulders, and embraced him; they understood each other, they held each other close and kissed with the sacred, blissful fervor, free from all ulterior motive, with which but a single kiss is blessed,—the first kiss by which two hearts take possession of each other.

"Ah!" cried Pauline, falling back on her chair, "I will never leave you again. I don't know whence I get such boldness!" she added, with a blush.

"Boldness, my Pauline? Oh! have no fear, it is love, true, passionate love, as undying as mine, is it not?"

"Oh! speak, speak, speak!" she cried. "Your mouth has been closed so long to me—"

"Did you love me in the old days?"

"Ah! God, did I love you! How many times I have wept here in this room, as I was making your bed, regretting your poverty and my own. I would have sold myself to the devil to spare you a single pang! And now, *my* Raphael,—for you are really mine,—that lovely head, your heart, all are mine!

ah! yes, your heart above everything, eternal wealth! —Let me see, where am I?" she continued, after a pause. "Ah! I know: We have three, four, five millions, I believe. If I were poor, I would, perhaps, insist upon bearing your name, upon being called your wife; but at this moment I would gladly sacrifice the whole world to you, I would like to be still and forever your servant. Look you, Raphael, when I offer you to-day my heart, my person, my fortune, I give nothing more than on the day when I put a certain five-franc piece there," she said, pointing to the table-drawer. "Oh! how sad your delight made me!"

"Why are you rich?" cried Raphael, "why have you no vanity? I can do nothing for you!"

He wrung his hands in joy, despair, and love.

"If you were Marquise de Valentin, my own dear heart,—I know you so well,—that title and my fortune would not be worth—"

"A single one of your hairs!" she cried.

"I have millions, too; but what are riches to us now? But I have my life, I can give you that, take it."

"Oh! your love, Raphael, your love is worth the world to me. Tell me, are not your thoughts mine? why, I am the happiest of the happy."

"Someone may hear us," said Raphael.

"No, there is no one to hear," she replied, with a pout.

"Then, come!" cried Valentin, holding out his arms.

She jumped upon his knees and clasped her hands around his neck.

"Kiss me," she said, "for all the pain you have caused me, to wipe out the sorrow your joy has made me suffer, for all the nights I have passed painting my screens—"

"Your screens?"

"As we are rich, my treasure, I can tell you all. Poor child! how easy it is to deceive men of wit! Do you suppose you could have clean white waistcoats and shirts twice a week for three francs a month? And you drank twice as much milk as you were entitled to for your money! I tricked you on everything: fire, oil, and money too! O my Raphael, don't take me for your wife," she added, with a laugh, "I am altogether too cunning a person."

"But how were you able to do it?"

"I worked till two o'clock in the morning, and I gave mother half of the price of my screens and you the other half."

They looked at each other a moment, both dazed with love and joy.

"Oh!" cried Raphael, "we shall certainly have to pay some day for this happiness with some horrible sorrow."

"It cannot be that you are married?" exclaimed Pauline. "Ah! I will not give you up to any woman."

"I am free, my beloved."

"Free!" she echoed. "Free, and mine!"

She fell on her knees, clasped her hands, and gazed at Raphael with devout ardor.

"I am afraid I shall go mad. How lovely you are!" she continued, passing one hand through her lover's fair hair. "What a fool that Comtesse Fœdora of yours must be! What joy I felt last night when I saw all those men bowing to me! She has never been applauded like that! Look you, darling, when my back touched your arm, I heard a voice within me, crying: 'He is here!' I turned and I saw you. I ran away, but oh! I longed to throw myself on your neck before everybody."

"You are very lucky to be able to talk," cried Raphael. "For my part, my heart is too full. I would like to weep, but I cannot. Don't take your hand away. It seems as if I could sit all my life and look at you like this, happy and satisfied."

"Oh! say that again, my love."

"Ah! what are words?" replied Valentin, letting a hot tear fall on Pauline's hand. "Later, I will try to tell you of my love; at this moment, I can only feel it."

"Oh!" she cried, "is that noble soul, that commanding genius, that heart that I know so well,—are they all mine as I am yours?"

"Forever, my sweet love," said Raphael, in a trembling voice, "you shall be my wife, my good genius. Your presence has always banished my sorrow and refreshed my soul; at this moment, your angelic smile has purified me, so to speak. I feel that I am beginning a new life. The cruel past and

my lamentable follies seem now to be nothing more than bad dreams. With you, I am pure. I breathe the air of happiness. Oh! stay here forever," he added, pressing her reverently to his wildly-beating heart.

"Let death come when it will," cried Pauline, in ecstasy, "I have lived!"

Happy is he who can realize their joy,—he must have experienced it.

"O my Raphael," said Pauline, after two hours of silence, "I wish that no one should ever enter this dear attic again!"

"We must wall up the door, put a grating over the window, and buy the house," replied the marquis.

"That is what we will do," she said.

"We seem to have forgotten to look for your manuscripts," she added, a moment later.

They began to laugh with the artlessness of children.

"Bah! I snap my fingers at all the sciences!" cried Raphael.

"Indeed, monsieur, and what about glory?"

"You are my only glory."

"You were very unhappy when you were making all these little fly-tracks," she said, as she turned over the sheets.

"My Pauline—"

"Ah! yes, I am your Pauline.—Well?"

"Where do you live?"

"Rue Saint-Lazare. And you?"

"Rue de Varenne."

"How far we shall be from each other until—"

She stopped and looked at her lover with an arch and mischievous expression.

"But," replied Raphael, "we have at most a fortnight to remain apart."

"Really! shall we be married in a fortnight?"

She jumped up and down like a child.

"Oh! I am an unnatural girl," she continued, "I have forgotten father and mother and everything else in the world! You do not know, poor darling, that my father is very ill. He came back from the Indies in very poor health. He almost died at Havre, where we went to meet him.—Great Heaven!" she exclaimed, looking at her watch, "three o'clock already! I must be at home when he wakes, at four o'clock. I am the mistress of the house: my mother does just what I want done, my father adores me, but I do not mean to abuse their indulgence, that would be too bad! Poor father! it was he who sent me to the Italiens last night. You will come to see him to-morrow, won't you?"

"Will Madame la Marquise de Valentin do me the honor to accept my arm?"

"I am going to carry away the key of this room," said she. "Is it not a palace, our treasure?"

"One more kiss, Pauline?"

"A thousand! My God! will it be always like this?" she said, looking at Raphael; "it seems as if I must be dreaming."

They went slowly down the stairs; then, walking

at the same pace, trembling in unison under the weight of the same happiness, pressing close together like two doves, they reached Place de la Sorbonne, where Pauline's carriage was waiting.

"I want to go home with you!" she cried. "I want to see your room, your study, and sit at the table at which you work. It will seem like old days," she added, with a blush.—"Joseph," she said to a footman, "I am going to Rue de Varenne before going home. It is quarter past three, and I must be at home at four. Tell Georges to drive fast."

In a few moments, the lovers were at Valentin's house.

"Oh! how pleased I am to have seen it all," cried Pauline, fondling the silk curtains that hung by Raphael's bed. "When I go to sleep, I shall be here in thought. I shall imagine your dear head on that pillow. Tell me, Raphael, did you take advice from nobody in furnishing your house?"

"From nobody."

"Really? There was no woman who—"

"Pauline!"

"Oh! I am frightfully jealous! You have excellent taste. I mean to have a bed just like yours to-morrow."

Raphael, drunken with happiness, seized Pauline.

"Oh! my father,—my father!" she exclaimed.

"I am going to escort you home, for I want to be away from you as little as possible," cried Valentin.

"How dearly you love me! I did not dare propose it to you."

"Why, are you not my whole life?"

It would be wearisome to set down faithfully all the adorable prattle of love, to which the tone, the glance, the untranslatable expression alone give value. Valentin escorted Pauline to her home, and returned, having in his heart as much joy as man can feel and carry on this earth. When he was seated in his easy-chair, in front of his fire, thinking of the sudden and complete realization of all his hopes, an icy thought passed through his mind as the blade of a dagger pierces the breast: he glanced at the skin; it had shrunk slightly. He uttered the emphatic French oath, but with none of the Jesuitical reticence of the Abbesse des Andouillettes, rested his head on the arm of his chair, and sat motionless, his eyes fastened upon a patera which he did not see.

"Great God!" he cried, "what! all my wishes, all! Poor Pauline!"

He took a pair of compasses and measured what remained of the skin, to see what the morning had cost him.

"I have only two months left!" he exclaimed.

A cold perspiration started from every pore; suddenly, in obedience to an indescribable outburst of frenzy, he tore the skin from the wall, crying:

"I am a great fool!"

He went out, ran through the gardens, and threw the talisman into a deep well.

"Come what may!" he said. "To the devil with all such nonsense!"

Thereupon Raphael abandoned himself to the happiness of loving, and lived heart to heart with Pauline. Their marriage, delayed by obstacles which it is useless to detail, was to be celebrated in the early days of March. They had tested each other, they did not doubt each other, and, happiness having revealed to them all the power of their affection, never had two hearts, two natures, been so perfectly united as they were by passion. Their love increased as they came to know each other better: on both sides there was the same delicacy of feeling, the same modesty, the same passion, the sweetest of all passions,—that that angels know; there were no clouds in their sky; the wish of one was law to the other. Both rich, they had no fancies which they could not gratify, and therefore they had no fancies. Exquisite taste, a keen appreciation of the beautiful, true poetic feeling, were the attributes of the bride that was to be; disdaining the trumpery so dear to the female heart, a smile from her lover seemed to her more beautiful than all the pearls of Ormuz, and muslin and flowers were her richest ornaments. Pauline and Raphael shunned society, solitude was so dear to them, so fruitful of pleasure! The loungers saw the pretty but sly couple regularly every evening at the Italiens or the Opéra. Although at first some unkind things were said in the salons, the whirlwind of events which soon swept over Paris caused the two inoffensive

lovers to be forgotten; then, too, their marriage was announced—a fact which prudes accept as an excuse, to a certain extent—and by good luck their servants happened to be close-mouthed; thus they were not punished for their happiness by any too malicious gossip.

One morning toward the close of February, a season when occasional fine days remind one of the approach of spring, Pauline and Raphael were breakfasting together in a small conservatory, a sort of salon filled with flowers, on a level with the garden. The mild, pale winter sun, whose beams shone through the scattered shrubbery, made the air warm and pleasant. The eye was attracted by the striking contrasts presented by the different kinds of foliage, by the coloring of the flowering shrubs, and by all the caprices of light and shade. When all Paris was still shivering by melancholy firesides, the young husband and wife were laughing together beneath an arbor of camellias, lilacs, and sweetbroom. Their merry faces arose above the narcissuses, lilies of the valley, and Bengal roses. In that gorgeous and beautiful conservatory the feet trod upon African mats of bright colors like rugs. The walls, hung with green ticking, bore not the slightest trace of dampness. The furniture was made of what seemed to be rough wood, but the bark fairly shone with cleanliness. A kitten was crouching on the table, to which it had been attracted by the smell of milk, and allowed Pauline to daub it with coffee; she frolicked with it, defended the cream which she just

allowed it to smell, thus giving it a lesson in patience and tempting it to keep up the struggle; she shouted with laughter at each of its grimaces and poured forth a constant stream of witticisms to prevent Raphael from reading the newspaper which had already fallen from his hands ten times. That morning scene was instinct with indescribable happiness, like everything that is natural and true. Raphael still pretended to read his paper and glanced furtively at Pauline, who was engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with the kitten—his Pauline, enveloped in a long *peignoir*, which veiled her but incompletely—his Pauline, with her hair in disorder and displaying a tiny blue-veined white foot in a black velvet slipper. Fascinating to look upon in her déshabillé, as charming as Westhall's fanciful figures, she seemed to be girl and woman at once; more girl than woman perhaps, she revelled in unalloyed bliss, and knew naught of love save its first delights. Seizing the moment when Raphael, absorbed by his pleasant reverie, had forgotten his paper, Pauline snatched it, tore it to shreds, made it into a ball and threw it into the garden, whither the kitten pursued the sheet which, like all things political, turned this way and that. When Raphael, diverted for a moment by this childish scene, attempted to resume his reading and made the familiar gesture of lifting the paper which he no longer held, there was a succession of peals of hearty, joyous laughter, born of one another like the songs of a bird.

"I am jealous of the newspaper," she said, wiping

away the tears that her childlike laughter had brought to her eyes. "Isn't it a downright felony to read Russian proclamations in my presence," she continued, suddenly becoming a woman once more, "and to prefer the Emperor Nicholas's words to the words and glances of love?"

"I was not reading, my blessed angel, I was looking at you."

At that moment, the gardener's heavy step was audible near the conservatory, his nailed shoes crunching the gravel of the paths.

"Excuse me, monsieur le marquis, for interrupting you, and madame too, but I have brought you a curiosity that I never saw anything like. As I was drawing a pail of water just now, saving your presence, I pulled up this strange marine plant! Here it is. It must be well used to the water, for it wasn't wet, not even damp. It was dry as wood and not swelled at all. As monsieur le marquis certainly knows more than I do, I thought I ought to bring it to him, and that he'd be interested in it."

Whereupon the gardener produced the inexorable bit of shagreen, which was not six square inches in extent.

"Thanks, Vanière," said Raphael, "it's a very curious thing."

"What is the matter, my darling, you are as pale as death!" cried Pauline.

"Leave us, Vanière."

"Your voice terrifies me," continued the girl, "it is strangely changed. What is the matter? how do

you feel? where is the pain? You are ill!—Jonathas, help! a doctor!"

"Hush! my own Pauline," replied Raphael, recovering his self-possession. "Let us go. There's a flower somewhere here whose odor distresses me. Perhaps it is that verbena."

Pauline pounced upon the innocent shrub, seized it by the stem, and threw it into the garden.

"O my love!" she cried, throwing her arms about Raphael in an embrace as strong as their love, and with languorous coquetry giving him her ruby lips to kiss; "when I saw you turn pale, I realized that I cannot survive you: your life is my life. My Raphael, put your hand on my back! I still feel a deathly chill. Your lips are burning. Give me your hand—it is like ice," she added.

"Silly girl!" exclaimed Raphael.

"Why that tear? Let me drink it."

"O Pauline, Pauline, you love me too much!"

"Something extraordinary is happening to you, Raphael! Be frank with me, I shall soon find out your secret. Give me that," she said, taking the shagreen skin.

"You are my executioner!" cried the young man, casting a glance of horror at the talisman.

"What a change of voice!" exclaimed Pauline, as she dropped the fatal symbol of destiny.

"Do you love me?" said he.

"Do I love you?—what a question!"

"Then leave me—begone!"

The poor girl left the room.

*

"What!" cried Raphael, when he was alone, "in a century when we have learned that diamonds are carbon crystals, in an age when an explanation is found for everything, when the police would drag a new Messiah before the courts and submit His miracles to the Academy of Sciences, in an age when people no longer believe in anything but a notary's seal, shall I believe in a sort of *Mene, Thekel, Upharsin?*—No, by God! I will not believe that the Supreme Being can take pleasure in tormenting an honest creature.—Let us go and see the scientific men."

He soon reached a little pond,—between the Wine Market, an immense storehouse of hogsheads, and the Salpêtrière, an immense training-school for drunkards,—a little pond in which a number of ducks, remarkable by reason of the rarity of their species, were splashing about, their brilliant plumage, like the stained glass in cathedral windows, gleaming in the sun's rays. All the ducks in the world were there, quacking, waddling, swimming, and forming a sort of duck congress, assembled against its will, but luckily without charter or political principles, and living, undisturbed by hunters, under the eye of naturalists who glanced at them occasionally by chance.

"There is Monsieur Lavrille," said a keeper to Raphael, who had inquired for that great pontiff of zoölogy.

The marquis saw a small man profoundly buried in sage meditations induced by the aspect of two ducks. That profound scholar, of uncertain age, had an attractive face, made even more attractive by an amiable expression; but scientific preoccupation was his reigning characteristic. His wig, which he was constantly scratching and pushing to one side in fantastic positions, allowed a line of white hair to appear underneath, and denoted the rage for discovery which, like all the passions, severs us so completely from the things of this world, that we lose all consciousness of the *ego*. Raphael, being a man of science and study, looked with admiration upon the naturalist, whose nightly vigils were devoted to the expansion of human knowledge, and whose very errors redounded to the glory of France: but a woman of fashion would have laughed, doubtless, at the solution of continuity between the savant's trousers and striped waistcoat, a gap modestly filled, however, by a shirt which he had copiously wrinkled by dint of stooping and rising in pursuance of his zoölogical observations.

After exchanging the customary courteous greetings, Raphael felt called upon to pay Monsieur Lavrille a commonplace compliment on his ducks.

"Oh! we are very rich in ducks," replied the naturalist. "This species is, by the way, as you are doubtless aware, the most prolific in the order

of palmipeds. It begins with the swan and ends with the *zinzin* duck, comprising a hundred and thirty-seven entirely distinct varieties, having each its name, its habits, its country, its characteristic features, and they resemble one another no more than a white man resembles a negro. In very truth, monsieur, when we eat a duck, we seldom think of the extent—"

He interrupted himself at sight of a pretty little duck that was climbing up the bank of the pond.

"There you see the cravatted swan, a poor child of Canada, come a long distance to show us his brown and gray plumage, his little black cravat! Look, he is scratching himself.—There is the famous downy goose or *eider* duck, under whose quilts our dainty mistresses lie; isn't he pretty? who could help admiring that little, reddish-white breast, that green beak?—I have just witnessed, monsieur," he continued, "a mating of which I had almost despaired. The marriage took place very successfully, and I shall await the result with impatience. I flatter myself that I shall obtain the one hundred and thirty-eighth species, to which, perhaps, my name will be given. There are the newly-wedded pair," he said, pointing to two ducks. "One of them is a laughing goose,—*anas albifrons*,—the other the great whistling duck,—Buffon's *anas ruffina*.—I hesitated a long while between the whistling duck, the duck with white eyebrows, and the *souchet* duck,—*anas clypeata*.—See, here is the *souchet*, this big, brown-black villain with the greenish neck so prettily

shaded. But, monsieur, the whistling duck was crested, and that decided me. The only one we lack now is the duck with the black cap. My brethren unanimously claim that that duck is another form of the crooked-billed teal; but for my own part—"

He made a delightful gesture wherein the modesty and the pride of the scholar could both be read, pride replete with obstinacy, modesty overflowing with self-sufficiency.

"I do not think so," he added. "You see, my dear monsieur, that we do something more than amuse ourselves here. I am engaged at this moment upon a monograph on the duck species.—But I am at your service."

As they walked toward an attractive little house on Rue Buffon, Raphael submitted the talisman to Monsieur Lavrille's examination.

"I know what this is," said the savant, at last, after bringing his magnifying-glass to bear upon the skin; "it was once used as the covering of some case. Shagreen is very old-fashioned. To-day, scabbard-makers prefer to use *galuchat*. *Galuchat*, you know, is the skin of the *raja sephen*, a fish of the Red Sea."

"But this, monsieur, as you are so extremely kind—?"

"This," replied the savant, interrupting him, "is a very different thing: between *galuchat* and shagreen, monsieur, there is all the difference that there is between sea and land, between a fish and a quadruped. The skin of the fish, by the way, is harder than the

skin of the terrestrial animal. This," he said, pointing to the talisman, "is, as you doubtless know, one of the most interesting products of zoölogy."

"Indeed!" cried Raphael.

"Monsieur," continued the savant, burying himself in his armchair, "this is the skin of an ass."

"I know it," said the young man.

"There is in Persia," continued the naturalist, "an extremely rare ass, the wild ass of the ancients, *equus asinus*, the *koulan* of the Tartars; Pallas went there to examine it, and it was he who gave it to science. Indeed, that animal had long been considered a myth. It is, as you doubtless know, mentioned in Holy Writ; Moses forbade it to be mated with its own species. But the wild ass is even more celebrated for the immoral uses to which it was put, of which the Biblical prophets often speak. Pallas, as you doubtless know, declares in his *Act. Petrop.*, volume ii, that those extraordinary excesses are still religiously believed in by the Persians and Tartars as producing a sovereign remedy for pains in the loins and sciatica. We poor Parisians have our doubts about it! The Museum doesn't possess a single specimen of the wild ass. What a superb animal!" continued the savant. "He is full of mystery; his eye is supplied with a sort of reflector to which the Eastern peoples attribute the power of fascination; his coat is more beautiful and more highly polished than that of our finest horses: it is marked with dark and light tawny stripes, and much resembles the skin of the zebra. His hair has a soft,

wavy, silky feeling; his eyesight is as prompt and accurate as man's; he is a little taller than our finest domestic asses, and is endowed with extraordinary courage. If, by chance, he is taken by surprise, he defends himself with remarkable skill against the fiercest beasts; as for his speed, it can be compared only to the flight of a bird; a wild ass, monsieur, would kill the best Arabian or Persian horse in a race. According to the father of the learned Doctor Niebuhr, whose recent loss, as you doubtless know, we all deplore, the average ordinary pace of these beautiful creatures is seven thousand geometric paces an hour. Our degenerate asses convey no idea of that proud and independent beast. He has an alert, animated bearing, a knowing expression, a shrewd, pleasant face, and his movements are full of coquetry! He is the zoölogical king of the Orient. Indeed, Turkish and Persian superstitions attribute to him a mysterious origin, and the name of Solomon is involved in the tales which the story-tellers of Thibet and Tartary relate concerning the prowess of these noble animals. A tame wild ass would be worth an immense sum of money; it is almost impossible to capture him in the mountains, where he leaps like a kid, and seems to fly like a bird. The fable of the winged horse, our Pegasus, undoubtedly started in that country, where the shepherds often see the wild asses leaping from rock to rock. The asses for saddle-use, obtained in Persia by breeding a jenny to a tame wild ass, are painted red, in accordance with immemorial tradition. It may be

that that custom gave birth to our proverb: 'Wicked as a red ass.' In my opinion, some traveller must have brought one of those interesting animals, which are very impatient of captivity, to France at a time when the study of natural history was very much neglected here. Hence the saying! This skin that you show me," continued the savant, "is the skin of a wild ass. We are not agreed as to the origin of the name. Some claim that *Chagri* is a Turkish word, others insist that *Chagri* is the place where this zoölogical product is subjected to the operation of a chemical preparation described by Pallas quite fully, which gives it the peculiar raised grain which we admire; Martellens writes me that *Châagri* is a stream—"

"I thank you, monsieur, for furnishing me with information which would make a valuable memorandum for some Dom Calmet, if the Benedictines still existed; but I have had the honor to call your attention to the fact that this fragment was originally of the size of—that map," said Raphael, pointing to an open atlas; "but, within three months, it has grown materially smaller."

"Very good," replied the savant, "I understand. Monsieur, the skins of all creatures primitively organized are subject to a natural contraction, easy to understand, the progress of which depends on atmospheric influences. Even the metals expand or contract to a perceptible degree, for engineers have noticed wide spaces between large rocks originally held together by iron bars. Science is of vast

extent, human life is very short. So it is that we do not pretend to be familiar with all the phenomena of nature."

"Monsieur," rejoined Raphael, well-nigh bewildered, "pray excuse the request I am about to make. Are you very sure that this skin is governed by the ordinary laws of zoölogy? can it be stretched?"

"Oh! certainly.—Deuce take it!" he exclaimed, as he tried to stretch the talisman. "Why, monsieur," he added, "if you care to go to see Planchette, the celebrated professor of mechanics, he will certainly find a way to act upon this skin, to soften it, to stretch it."

"Ah, monsieur, you save my life!"

Raphael saluted the learned naturalist, and hurried to Planchette's house, leaving Lavrille in his study, which was filled with little bottles and dried plants. He carried away from that visit, unknowingly, the sum of all human knowledge—a nomenclature! The worthy Lavrille resembled Sancho Panza telling Don Quixote the story of the goats; he found his amusement in counting animals and cataloguing them. Although he had reached the brink of the tomb, he knew only the smallest fraction of the vast herd scattered by God through the ocean of worlds for an unknown purpose. Raphael was content.

"I am going to put a bit in my ass's mouth," he cried.

Sterne had said before he was born: "Spare your ass if you would live to be old." But the beast is such a capricious creature!

Planchette was a tall, thin man, a veritable poet lost in never-ending contemplation, always looking into a bottomless abyss, MOTION. The common herd characterizes as foolish such sublime minds, misunderstood men who pass their lives in admirable indifference to luxury and the world, keeping an unlighted cigar in their mouths whole days, or entering salons without having always effected a perfect union between the buttons and buttonholes of their clothing. Some day, after they have passed many months measuring emptiness, or piling up X's under Aa–Gg, they are found to have analyzed some natural law and dissected the simplest of principles; suddenly the multitude gazes in admiration at some new machine or some vehicle whose simple construction amazes and confounds us. The modest scientist smiles as he says to his admirers: "What have I done, pray? nothing. Man does not invent force, he guides it, and science consists in imitating nature."

Raphael surprised the mechanism planted on his two legs, like a pendulum that has fallen in an erect position directly beneath its hook. He was examining an agate ball rolling around on a sun-dial, waiting for it to stop. The poor man had no decoration and no pension, for he had not the art of giving brilliancy to his calculations. Happy to live on the watch for discoveries, he thought neither of glory, nor of the world, nor of himself, but lived in science for science's sake.

"That is most extraordinary!" he cried.—"Ah! monsieur," he added, as he caught sight of Raphael,

"I am your servant. How is your mother? Go in and see my wife."

"I might have lived such a life as this!" said Raphael to himself, as he interrupted the professor's reverie by asking him how he could act upon the talisman which he showed him.

"Though you may laugh at my credulity," added the marquis, with a smile, "I will tell you the whole story. This skin seems to me to possess a power of resistance against which nothing will have any effect."

"Monsieur," said Planchette, "men of the world always treat science very cavalierly, they all tell us substantially what a dandy said to Lalande, when he brought some ladies to see him after an eclipse: 'Be good enough to begin over again.' What effect do you wish to produce? The purpose of mechanics is to apply the laws of motion or to neutralize them. As to motion in itself, I admit with all humility that we are powerless to define it. That being understood, we have observed some unvarying phenomena which regulate the action of solids and fluids. By reproducing the moving causes of those phenomena, we can transport bodies, transmit to them a locomotive force up to a certain determined speed, set them in motion, divide them once or an indefinite number of times, either by breaking or by pulverizing them; then we can twist them, give them a rotary motion, change their form, compress them, expand them, stretch them. That science, monsieur, depends upon a single fact. You see that ball," he continued. "It

is here on this stone. Now it is there. By what name shall we describe that act, so natural physically, so extraordinary morally? Motion, locomotion, change of place? What immeasurable vanity is concealed beneath those words! Pray, is a name a solution? Nevertheless, all science is comprised in that. Our machines make use of that motion, that fact, in whole or in part. This trivial phenomenon, if applied to large masses, will blow up Paris. We can increase speed at the expense of force, and force at the expense of speed. What are force and speed? Our knowledge is unable to tell, even as it is to create motion. Motion, of whatever sort, is an immense power, and man does not invent powers. Like motion, which is the very essence of power, power is a unit. Everything is motion. Thought is a motion. Nature is founded upon motion. Death is a form of motion of whose ends we know but little. If God is eternal, be sure that He is always in motion. Indeed, God *is* motion, perhaps. That is why motion is inexplicable, like Him, and, like Him, profound, without limits, incomprehensible, intangible. Who has ever touched, measured, understood motion? We feel its effects without seeing them. We may even deny them as we deny God. Where is it? where is it not? Whence does it come? Where is its active principle? where its end? It envelops us, hurries us on, and eludes us. It is evident as a fact, obscure as an abstraction, effect and cause at once. Like ourselves, it needs space, and what is space? Motion alone

reveals it to us; except for motion, it is a mere word without meaning. An insoluble problem, like the great void, like creation, like infinity, motion confounds human thought, and all that man is permitted to understand is that he will never understand it. Between each two points successively occupied by that ball in space," continued the scholar, "there is an abyss for the human reason, an abyss into which Pascal fell. In order to act upon the unknown substance which we wish to submit to an unknown force, we must first study the substance; it will break or it will resist, according to its nature; if it breaks and it was not your intention to divide it, we do not attain the desired result. If you wish to compress it, we must transmit a uniform motion to all parts of the substance, so as to diminish uniformly the distance that separates them. If you wish to stretch it, we should try to impress upon each molecule an equal eccentric force; for, unless we carefully observe that law, we should produce solutions of continuity. There are in motion, monsieur, an infinitude of methods, combinations without number. Where will you stop?"

"Monsieur," said Raphael, impatiently, "I desire a force of some sort powerful enough to stretch this skin indefinitely."

"The substance being finite," rejoined the mathematician, "could not be indefinitely stretched, but stretching will necessarily increase its superficial area at the expense of its thickness; it will grow thinner and thinner until the material fails—"

"Effect that result, monsieur," cried Raphael, "and you will have earned millions."

"I should steal your money," rejoined the professor, with the stolidity of a Dutchman. "I propose to demonstrate to you in two words the existence of a machine under which God himself would be crushed like a fly. It would reduce a man to the condition of paper pulp—a man booted and spurred and cravatted, hat, money, jewels, everything—"

"What a horrible machine!"

"Instead of throwing the children into the water, the Chinese ought to turn them to some use in that way," continued the professor, without regard to man's respect for his progeny.

Absorbed in his idea, Planchette took an empty flower-pot with a hole in the bottom and placed it on the face of the sun-dial; then he brought a little clay from a corner of the garden. Raphael looked on, fascinated, like a child to whom its nurse is telling a fairy-tale. Having placed his clay on the dial, Planchette drew a knife, cut off two branches of an elder-bush, and began to hollow them, whistling as if Raphael were not there.

"There are the elements of the machine," he said.

He fastened one of the tubes by an elbow of clay to the bottom of the pot, in such manner that the end of the tube was opposite the hole in the pot. You would have said that it was a great pipe. He spread a layer of clay on the dial, making it of the shape of a shovel, placed the flower-pot on the widest

part, and fastened the elder-branch on the part representing the handle. Lastly, he put a quantity of clay at the end of the tube and stuck the other hollow branch upright in it, making another elbow to connect it with the horizontal branch, so that the air or any other ambient fluid could circulate through the improvised machine and flow from the mouth of the vertical tube, through the intermediate canal, to the large empty flower-pot.

"This apparatus, monsieur," he said to Raphael, with the gravity of an academician pronouncing his reception discourse, "constitutes one of the great Pascal's most noteworthy claims to our admiration."

"I don't understand—"

The professor smiled. He went and took down from a fruit-tree a small bottle in which his druggist had sent him a liquid to catch ants; he broke off the bottom, thus forming a funnel, fitted it carefully to the aperture of the hollow branch which he had planted upright in the clay, opposite to the large reservoir represented by the flower-pot; then he poured from a watering-pot the necessary quantity of water to come to the top of the flower-pot and the little circular orifice of the tube.—Raphael thought of his piece of shagreen.

"Monsieur," said the physicist, "water is considered an incompressible substance to this day—do not forget that fundamental principle; to be sure, it may be compressed, but so slightly, that we reckon its compressibility as zero. You see the surface of the water at the top of the flower-pot?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very well; now, imagine that surface to be a thousand times greater than the orifice of the elder-branch through which I poured the liquid. See, I remove the funnel—"

"I see."

"Very well, monsieur, if by any means whatever I increase the volume of that mass by pouring more water in at the orifice of the little tube, the liquid, forced to descend, will ascend in the reservoir represented by the flower-pot until it reaches the same level in both."

"That is clear," cried Raphael.

"But there is this difference," continued Planchette; "if the small column of water in the little vertical tube represents a force equal to a weight of one pound, for example, as its action will be faithfully transmitted to the liquid mass and will act upon all points of the surface presented by it in the flower-pot, there will be a thousand columns of water which, as they all tend to rise as if they were pushed upward by a force equal to that which forces the liquid to descend in the vertical tube, will necessarily produce here," said Planchette, indicating the orifice of the watering-pot, "a power one thousand times greater than the power introduced there."

And the professor pointed to the wooden tube planted upright in the clay.

"That is very simple," said Raphael.

Planchette smiled.

"In other words," he resumed, with the tenacious

logic characteristic of mathematicians, "we must, in order to repel the irruption of water, exert, upon every part of the larger surface, a force equal to the force at work in the vertical conduit; but, with this difference, that, if the liquid column is a foot high, the thousand small columns in the large reservoir will be of very slight elevation. Now," said Planchette, throwing away his tubes, "if we replace this curious little apparatus by metallic tubes of the proper strength and dimensions, if we cover the surface of the liquid in the large reservoir with a strong movable plate, and if you place above it another immovable plate, whose strength and power of resistance are equal to any strain—if, furthermore, you give me the power of constantly adding water to the liquid mass, through the little vertical tube, any object placed between the two solid plates must necessarily yield to the immense force of indefinite compressing power. The method of introducing water constantly through the small tube is mere child's play in mechanics, as is the method of transmitting the power of the liquid mass to a solid plate. Two pistons and a few valves are all that are necessary. Can you not imagine, then, my dear monsieur," he added, taking Raphael's arm, "that there are few substances which, when placed between those two unlimited resistant forces, will not inevitably be flattened out?"

"What!" cried Raphael, "the author of *Les Lettres Provinciales* invented—?"

"He alone, monsieur. There is nothing simpler or prettier in the whole science of mechanics. The

opposite principle, the expansibility of water, led to the creation of the steam-engine. But water can be expanded only to a certain degree, while its incompressibility, being a negative force, so to speak, is necessarily unlimited."

"If that skin is stretched," said Raphael, "I promise to erect a colossal statue to Blaise Pascal, to offer a prize of a hundred thousand francs for the most noteworthy problem in mechanics solved in every decade, to provide marriage-portions for your cousins and second cousins, and to build a hospital for scientists who become lunatics or paupers."

"That would be very useful," said Planchette. "Monsieur," he continued, with the tranquillity of a man living in a sphere wholly intellectual, "we will go to-morrow to see Spieghalter. That distinguished mechanician has just made, from my plans, a perfected machine with which a child might make his hat large enough to hold a thousand bundles of hay."

"Until to-morrow, monsieur."

"Until to-morrow."

"Talk to me about mechanics!" cried Raphael. "Isn't it the noblest of all sciences? That other fellow, with his wild asses, his ducks, his classifications, his species, and his bottles full of monstrosities, is good for nothing but to mark points in a public billiard-hall!"

The next day, Raphael, in high spirits, called for Planchette, and they went together to Rue de la Santé,—*Health*,—a name of favorable augury. At Spieghalter's, the young man found himself in a huge

establishment, and he saw a multitude of forges, red and roaring. It was a perfect rain of fire, a deluge of nails, an ocean of pistons, vises, levers, beams, files, screws, a sea of castings, wood, valves, and steel bars. Iron filings choked him. There was iron in the temperature, the men were covered with iron, everything smelt of iron, iron was alive, it had an organism, it liquefied, it walked and thought, assuming all manner of forms, obeying all manner of caprices. Through the roaring of the bellows, the *crescendo* of the hammers, the hissing of the lathes that made the iron groan, Raphael finally reached a large room, clean and well-aired, where he could contemplate at his leisure the immense press of which Planchette had spoken. He admired the cast-iron timbers, if we may call them so, and the twin iron plates connected by indestructible bolts.

"If you should turn that crank rapidly seven times," said Spieghalter, pointing to a handle of polished steel, "you would break a steel plate into millions of pieces that would stick into your legs like needles."

"The devil!" cried Raphael.

Planchette himself placed the shagreen between the two plates of the powerful press, and, filled with the sense of security born of scientific convictions, he turned the crank rapidly.

"Lie down all, we are dead men!" cried Spieghalter in a voice of thunder, throwing himself on the ground.

A horrible hissing sound filled the workshops. The water in the machine broke the castings, burst forth in a stream of immeasurable force and luckily went in the direction of an old anvil, which it overturned and twisted into a shapeless mass, as a tornado twists a house and whirls it away.

"Aha!" said Planchette, coolly, "the shagreen is as sound as my eye! There was a flaw in your casting, Master Spieghalter, or a hole in the large tube."

"No, no, I know my casting. Monsieur can take away the thing, the devil's in it!"

The German seized a blacksmith's hammer, placed the shagreen on an anvil, and with all the strength that anger gives, dealt the talisman the most terrible blow that ever rang through those workshops.

"It doesn't show a sign," cried Planchette, fondling the obstinate skin.

The workmen ran to the spot. The foreman took the skin and plunged it amid the glowing coals of a forge. The others all stood in a semicircle around the fire, impatiently awaiting the effect of the action of an enormous bellows. Raphael, Spieghalter, and Professor Planchette stood in the centre of that begrimed, intensely interested crowd. As he looked upon all those white eyes, those faces black with iron dust, those shiny black clothes, those hairy breasts, Raphael fancied that he had been transported to the imaginary, nocturnal world of the German ballads. The foreman seized the skin with a pair of tongs after leaving it in the fire ten minutes.

"Give it to me," said Raphael.

The foreman jestingly presented it to him with the tongs. The marquis, without inconvenience, held it, as cold and supple as ever, in his hand. There was a general cry of horror, and the workmen fled. Raphael and Planchette were left alone in the deserted workshop.

"There certainly is something diabolical in the thing!" cried Raphael in despair. "Is there, then, no human power that can add one day to my life?"

"I was wrong, monsieur," said the mathematician, with a contrite expression, "we ought to have put that extraordinary skin through a rolling-mill. Where were my eyes when I proposed compression to you?"

"It was I who suggested it," replied Raphael.

The savant drew a long breath, like a culprit acquitted by a jury of his peers. Deeply interested, however, by the strange problem presented by the bit of shagreen, he reflected a moment and said:

"That unknown substance should be treated by reagents. Let us go to see Japhet; perhaps chemistry will have better luck than mechanics."

Valentin urged his horse to his utmost speed, hoping to find the famous chemist Japhet in his laboratory.

"Well, my old friend," said Planchette, as he discovered Japhet sitting in an easy-chair and gazing at a precipitate, "how goes chemistry?"

"It's asleep. There's nothing new. The Academy

has recognized the existence of salicine, to be sure, but salicine, asparagine, vauqueline, digitalin, are not new discoveries."

"In default of the power of inventing things," observed Raphael, "it seems that you are reduced to inventing names."

"*Pardieu!* that is true, young man!"

"Here," said Professor Planchette, "try to decompose this substance for us; if you succeed in extracting any principle whatever from it, I name it in advance *diaboline*, for we just broke a hydraulic press, trying to compress it."

"Let me see it, let me see it!" cried the chemist, joyfully; "perhaps it will turn out to be a new elementary substance."

"Monsieur," said Raphael, "it is simply a piece of an ass's hide."

"Monsieur—" began the famous chemist, gravely.

"I am not jesting," rejoined the marquis, handing him the piece of shagreen.

Baron Japhet applied to the skin the nerve-centres of his tongue, which were so quick to distinguish salts, acids, alkalis, and gases, and said, after several tests:

"It has no taste! Well, we'll give it a little fluorine to drink."

Subjected to the action of that fluid, which disorganizes animal tissues so rapidly, the skin underwent no change whatever.

"This isn't shagreen!" cried the chemist. "We will treat the mysterious stranger as a mineral, and

do it up by putting it in a crucible in which I happen to have some red potassium."

He left the room and soon returned.

"Monsieur," he said, "allow me to take a piece of that strange substance, it is altogether abnormal."

"A piece?" cried Raphael; "not as much as a hair's breadth!—However, you may try," he added, with a half-sad, half-bantering expression.

The chemist broke a razor trying to cut the skin, he tried to destroy it by a powerful charge of electricity, then he subjected it to the action of the voltaic pile—in short, all the thunderbolts of science failed to produce any effect on the awe-inspiring talisman. It was seven o'clock in the evening. Planchette, Japhet, and Raphael, heedless of the flight of time, were awaiting the result of a last experiment. The shagreen emerged victorious from a terrific explosion which it was made to undergo by the agency of a large quantity of chloride of nitrogen.

"I am lost!" cried Raphael. "The hand of God is in it. I must die."

He left the two scientists in a state of stupefaction.

"We must be sure not to relate this experience at the Academy, our colleagues would laugh at us," said Planchette to the chemist, after a long pause, during which they had gazed at each other without the courage to communicate their thoughts.

They were like Christians emerging from their graves, having failed to find a God in heaven. Science powerless! Acids as weak as clear water!

Red potassium disgraced! The voltaic pile and the lightning mere playthings!

"A hydraulic press crushed like a slice of bread!" exclaimed Planchette.

"I believe in the devil," said Baron Japhet, after a pause.

"And I in God," said Planchette.

Both spoke as their professions taught them. To a mechanician the universe is a machine that requires somebody to work it; to chemistry, the work of a demon who goes about decomposing everything, the world is a gas endowed with motion.

"We can't deny the fact," observed the chemist.

"Bah! Messieurs the doctrinaires have invented for our consolation the nebulous axiom: 'Stupid as a fact.'"

"Your axiom," said the chemist, "seems to me a stupid fact."

Whereat they laughed, and dined together like men who no longer looked upon a miracle as anything more than a phenomenon.

*

Valentin, on his return home, was in a state of cold frenzy; he no longer believed in anything, his ideas were confused in his brain, and twisted and flickered like any man's in presence of an inexplicable fact. He had readily believed that there was some hidden flaw in Spieghalter's machine, the impotence of science and of fire did not astonish him; but the suppleness of the skin when he handled it, its toughness when all the means of destruction known to man were directed upon it, terrified him. That incontestable fact made his brain whirl.

"I am mad!" he said to himself. "Although I have had nothing to eat since this morning, I am neither hungry nor thirsty, and I feel a burning fire in my chest."

He replaced the shagreen in the frame in which it had formerly been kept; and, after describing by a red line the present outline of the talisman, he sat down in his armchair.

"Eight o'clock already!" he cried. "This day has passed like a dream."

He rested his elbow on the arm of his chair, leaned his head on his left hand and sat there, absorbed in one of those dismal meditations, one of those consuming thoughts whose secret is carried to the grave by men condemned to death.

"Ah! Pauline," he cried, "poor child! there are chasms that love cannot cross, despite the strength of its wings."

At that moment, he distinctly heard a stifled sigh, and recognized, by virtue of one of the most touching privileges of passion, his Pauline's breath.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "that is my sentence. If she were here, I would like to die in her arms."

A burst of hearty, joyous laughter made him turn his head toward his bed, he saw through the transparent curtains Pauline's face smiling like a child pleased at a successful piece of mischief; her lovely hair fell in myriads of curls over her shoulders; she was like a Bengal rose on a heap of white roses.

"I bribed Jonathas," she said. "Doesn't this bed belong to me who am your wife? Don't scold me, darling, I only wanted to sleep beside you, to surprise you. Forgive me this frolic."

She leaped out of bed with a catlike movement, appeared before him radiant in her muslin robes, and sat upon his knee.

"Of what chasm were you speaking, my love?" she said, with a wrinkle of anxiety on her brow.

"Of death."

"You hurt me," she rejoined. "There are certain thoughts that we poor women can't endure to let our minds rest upon, they kill us. Is it from abundance of love or lack of courage? I don't know. Death has no terrors for me," she continued, with a laugh. "To die with you to-morrow morning, with our lips joined in a last kiss, would be perfect

bliss. It seems to me that I should have lived more than a hundred years. What matters the number of days, if in a single night, a single hour, we have drained dry a whole lifetime of peace and love?"

"You are right, Heaven speaks through your sweet mouth. Give it to me that I may kiss it, and let us die," said Raphael.

"Yes, let us die," she laughed.

About nine in the morning, the daylight shone through the chinks in the blinds; although diminished by the muslin curtains, it still enabled one to distinguish the rich colors of the carpets and the silky coverings of the furniture of the room in which the lovers lay. Bits of gilding glistened here and there. A ray of sunlight rested on the eider-down quilt which the antics of love had thrown to the floor. Pauline's dress, hanging on a large mirror, resembled a vague apparition. The tiny slippers had been left at a distance from the bed. A nightingale perched on the window-sill; his constant trills and the noise made by his wings, as he suddenly spread them to fly away, awoke Raphael.

"In order to die," he said, completing a line of thought begun in his dream, "my organism, this machine of flesh and bones animated by my will, which constitutes me an individual man, must necessarily exhibit some discoverable lesion. The doctors should be familiar with the symptoms of impaired vitality and able to tell me whether I am well or ill."

He gazed at his sleeping wife, whose arm was about his neck, thus expressing, even in sleep, the

tender anxiety of love. Lying gracefully as a child, with her face turned toward him, Pauline seemed to be looking at him and to be offering him her sweet lips, parted by a pure, regular respiration. Her little porcelain-like teeth set off the brilliant red of her moist lips, about which a smile was playing; the flush upon her cheeks was more brilliant and their whiteness was more white, so to speak, at that moment, than during the most loving hours of the day. Her graceful abandon, instinct with confidence, combined with the charm of love the adorable fascinations of a sleeping child. All women, even the most natural and unaffected, comply during the day with certain social conventions, which fetter the artless outpourings of their hearts; but sleep seems to restore the impulsiveness that is the great charm of childhood: like one of the dear, divine creatures, whom the mind has not yet taught to sow thoughts in its gestures or secrets in its glance, Pauline blushed at nothing. Her profile stood out sharply against the fine linen pillow-cases, and great frills of lace, mingled with her dishevelled hair, gave her a little roguish expression; but she had fallen asleep with joy at her heart, her long lashes were resting on her cheek as if to protect her eyes from a too bright light or to assist in securing that tranquillity of soul which seeks to prolong an unalloyed but fleeting pleasure. Her tiny pink and white ear, surrounded by a tress of hair and outlined by a shell of Malines lace, would have made an artist, a painter, an old man, mad with love, and might, perhaps, have

restored a madman to his senses. Is it not a nameless delight to watch your mistress while she sleeps, smiling in a peaceful dream under your protection, loving you even in her dreams, at a moment when it seems as if all that was material in her had ceased to exist, and offering you her silent lips which speak to you in sleep of the last kiss? to see a confiding woman, half-nude, enveloped in her love as in a cloak, and chaste in the very midst of disarray? to gaze with fond admiration upon her scattered clothing, a silk stocking hastily removed the night before to please you, an unfastened girdle denoting infinite trust in you? That girdle is a whole poem in itself; the woman it once protected no longer exists, she belongs to you, she has become *you;* to betray her now is to inflict a wound upon yourself. Raphael, deeply moved, looked about that room overflowing with memories, where the atmosphere was heavily charged with love, where the very daylight assumed voluptuous shades, then turned his eyes upon the woman of pure, youthful form, loving and true, whose every thought and feeling were his and his alone. He longed to live forever. When his glance rested upon Pauline, she immediately opened her eyes as if a sunbeam had shone into them.

"Good-morning, my dear," she said, with a smile. "How handsome you are, bad boy!"

The two faces, stamped with a charm due to love, to youth, to the half-light, and to the silence, formed one of those divine scenes whose ephemeral witchery belongs only to the early days of passion, just as

artlessness and candor are the attributes of childhood. Alas! those springtime joys of love, like the joyous laughter of our early youth, are destined to flee and to live only in our memory, to drive us to despair or send us a whiff of comfort, according to the caprices of our secret meditations.

"Why did you wake?" said Raphael. "It gave me so much pleasure to watch you while you were asleep, I was weeping—"

"And so was I," she interposed, "I wept last night as I watched you in your sleep, but not with joy. Listen, my Raphael, listen to me. When you are asleep, your breathing is not free, there's something in your chest that makes a noise and frightens me. When you're asleep, you have a little hacking cough, just like my father's, and he is dying of consumption. I detected some of the strange results of that disease in the noise in your lungs. Then you were feverish, too, I am sure, your hand was so moist and hot.—Dear heart, you are young," she added, with a shudder, "you can cure yourself even now, if unfortunately— But, no," she cried, joyfully, "there is no misfortune about it, for the disease is contagious, the doctors say."

With that she twined her arms about Raphael, and breathed his breath in one of those kisses in which the heart comes to the lips.

"I have no wish to live to be old," she said. "Let us both die young, and we will go to heaven with our hands full of flowers."

"Such plans we always make when we're in good

health," replied Raphael, running his hands through Pauline's hair.

But at that moment he had a horrible fit of coughing, one of those violent, hollow coughs which seem to come from a coffin, which drive the color from an invalid's brow and leave him trembling, bathed in sweat, after irritating all his nerves, jarring his frame, tiring his spinal cord and causing the blood to flow with mysterious sluggishness through his veins. Raphael, pale and trembling, slowly lay back upon the bed, completely exhausted, like a man whose whole force has been expended in a final effort. Pauline watched him with staring eyes, increased in size by fear, and remained motionless, white-faced and silent.

"Let us not be foolish again, my angel," she said, seeking to conceal from Raphael the ghastly presentiments that filled her mind.

She covered her face with her hands, for she recognized the hideous, grinning mask of DEATH. Raphael's face had become livid and gaunt like a skull exhumed from a cemetery to assist the investigations of some scholar. Pauline remembered the exclamation that had escaped him the night before, and she said to herself:

"Yes, there are chasms which love cannot cross, but in which it must be swallowed up."

A few days after that scene of desolation, Raphael found himself, one morning in March, sitting in an armchair, surrounded by four physicians who had placed him at the window of his bedroom in a bright

light, and one after another felt his pulse, sounded him, and questioned him with apparent interest. The sick man tried to divine their thoughts by interpreting their gestures and the slightest wrinkles that gathered on their brows. That consultation was his last hope. Those judges of the court of last resort were about to deliver a judgment of life or death. And so, in order to extort from human science its ultimatum, Valentin had convoked the oracles of modern medicine. Thanks to his great wealth and his name, the three systems between which human belief was wavering were all there before him. Three of the doctors brought with them the philosophy of medicine, representing the battle then being fought by the theory of mental influence, analysis, and Heaven knows what scoffing eclecticism. The fourth physician was Horace Bianchon, a man of immense learning, and of great promise, the most distinguished, perhaps, of the new school of doctors, a virtuous and modest representative of the studious youth who are preparing to inherit the treasures amassed during the last fifty years by the School of Paris, and who will, perhaps, build the monument for which preceding ages have provided such abundant and diverse material. Being a friend of the marquis and of Rastignac, he had been attending him for several days, and assisted him to reply to the questions of the three professors, to whom he explained now and then, with considerable earnestness, the symptoms that seemed to indicate pulmonary consumption.

"You must have indulged in tremendous excesses, have led a life of dissipation? you have expended your intellectual powers upon some great work?" observed that one of the three famous doctors whose square head, broad face, and energetic manner seemed to denote genius superior to that of his two antagonists.

"I tried to kill myself by dissipation after toiling three years at a work of vast scope which you will, perhaps, hear of some day," replied Raphael.

The great doctor nodded his head in token of satisfaction, as if he were saying to himself: "I was sure of it!" He was the illustrious Brisset, the leader of the *organistes*, the successor of the Cabanis and Bichats, the physician of the positive, materialistic minds, who regard man as a finite being, subject to the laws of his own organism only, whose condition, normal or abnormal, can be explained by visible causes.

At the patient's reply, Brisset glanced silently at a man of medium height whose flushed face and gleaming eye seemed to belong to some satyr of ancient times, and who stood with his back against the corner of the window, watching Raphael closely without speaking. A man of exalted aspirations and of faith, Doctor Caméristus, leader of the *vitalistes* and poetic defender of the abstract doctrines of Van Helmont, saw in human life a lofty, secret principle, an inexplicable phenomenon which mocks at scalpels, misleads surgery, eludes the drugs of the pharmacopœia, the X's of algebra, the

demonstrations of anatomy, and laughs at our efforts; a sort of invisible, intangible flame, governed by some divine law, which often clings to a body condemned by our decrees, even as it often deserts the bodies apparently most likely to live.

A sardonic smile played about the lips of the third, Doctor Maugredie, a mind of a high order, but a Pyrrhonean and a mocker, who believed in nothing but the scalpel, conceded to Brisset the death of a man who was apparently perfectly well, and agreed with Caméristus that a man might live after his death. He found some good, therefore, in all theories, adopted none, claimed that the best medical system was to have none, and to be governed by the tacts of each case. That Panurge of the schools, that king of the realm of observation, that great explorer, that great scoffer, that man of desperate experiments, was examining the piece of shagreen.

"I would like very much to see with my eyes the coincidence between your desires and its shrinking," he said to the marquis.

"Why?" cried Brisset.

"Why?" echoed Caméristus.

"Ah! you are agreed," said Maugredie.

"That contraction is a perfectly simple matter," added Brisset.

"It is supernatural," said Caméristus.

"In very truth," retorted Maugredie, assuming a solemn expression and returning the shagreen to Raphael, "the shrinking of leather is an inexplicable yet perfectly natural fact, which has been the

despair of medical science and of pretty women from the beginning of the world."

A close scrutiny of the three doctors failed to reveal to Raphael any indication of sympathy for his ills. All three, silent after every reply, eyed him indifferently and questioned him without pitying him. Lack of interest showed itself through their courtesy. Whether from conviction or from a wish to reflect, their words were so few and so listless that at times Raphael believed them to be thinking of something else. From time to time Brisset alone replied: "Indeed! ah, yes!" to the critical symptoms whose presence was pointed out by Bianchon. Caméristus remained absorbed in profound meditation; Maugredie resembled a comic author making a study of two original characters in order to transport them faithfully to the stage. Horace's features betrayed deep distress, emotion overflowing with sadness. He had been a physician too short a time to be insensible in the presence of suffering and to stand unmoved beside a bed of death; he did not know how to force back from his eyes the friendly tears that prevent a man from seeing distinctly and from seizing upon the propitious moment for gaining the victory, like the general of an army, deaf to the cries of the dying. After spending about half an hour in taking the measure, so to speak, of the invalid and the disease, as a tailor measures a young man who orders his wedding outfit, they made a few commonplace remarks and even spoke of public affairs; then they proposed adjourning to Raphael's study in order to

communicate their ideas to one another and draw up their judgment.

"May I not be present at the discussion, messieurs?" asked Valentin.

Brisset and Maugredie cried out in horror at the thought, and despite their patient's insistence they refused to deliberate in his presence. Raphael bowed to the custom of the profession, thinking that he could slip into a passage where he could easily hear the medical discussions in which the three professors were about to engage.

"Messieurs," said Brisset, on entering the room, "allow me to give you my opinion at once. I have no desire to force it upon you, nor to see it made a subject of controversy: in the first place, it is clear and precise, and is due to the fact that I have a patient whose case is absolutely identical with that of the *subject* we have been called upon to examine; and in the second place, I am expected at my hospital. The importance of the matter that demands my presence there must be my excuse for speaking first. The *subject* before us is worn out both by intellectual labors— What has he done, Horace?" he said, addressing the young physician.

"A *Theory of the Will.*"

"Ah! the devil, that's a large subject.—He is worn out, I say, by excessive thought, by irregular diet, by the constant use of too-powerful stimulants. Thus the violent action of the body and the brain has thrown the whole mechanism out of gear. It is very easy, messieurs, to detect in the symptoms

exhibited by the face and body a very great irritation of the stomach, neurosis of the sympathetic nerves, extreme sensitiveness in the epigastrium, and contraction of the hypochondriac region. You have noticed the size and protuberance of the liver. Monsieur Bianchon has kept close watch on his patient's digestion, and tells us that it is very laborious and difficult. Properly speaking, the stomach no longer exists at all; the man has disappeared. The intellect is emasculated because the man no longer digests his food. The progressive deterioration of the epigastrium, the centre of life, has poisoned the whole system. From that point there is constant, persistent irradiation; the disorder has reached the brain by way of the nervous plexus, hence the extreme irritation of that organ. There is a species of monomania. The patient is under the yoke of a fixed idea. To his mind that bit of shagreen really shrinks; perhaps it has always been of the same size that we saw to-day, but, whether it contracts or not, that *chagrin* is to him the fly that a certain grand vizier had on his nose. Apply leeches to the epigastrium at once, allay the irritation of that organ in which the whole man resides, keep the patient on a strict diet, and the monomania will cease. I need say no more to Doctor Bianchon; he will understand the whole case and the details of the treatment. It may be that there's some complication; perhaps the respiratory passages are irritated also; but I deem the treatment of the intestinal apparatus much more important, more necessary, more urgent,

than that of the lungs. Persistent study of abstract subjects in conjunction with violent passions has produced grave disturbances in that vital mechanism; there is still time, however, to tighten up the springs, nothing is too seriously impaired. Therefore you can easily save your friend," he said to Bianchon.

"Our learned colleague mistakes the effect for the cause," Caméristus began. "True, the changes so accurately noted by him have taken place in the patient, but the stomach did not gradually throw out divergent rays into the whole organism and toward the brain, as a crack in a pane of glass throws out rays on every side. It required a blow to make the hole in the glass; who dealt that blow? do we know? have we observed the patient sufficiently? are we familiar with all the incidents of his life? Messieurs, the vital principle, Van Helmont's *archeus*, is impaired in him, vitality itself is attacked in its essence; the divine spark, the ephemeral intelligence which serves to hold the machine together and which produces will, the science of life, has ceased to regulate the daily phenomena of the machinery and the functions of each organ: from this cause come the disturbances so well described by my learned brother. The trouble moves from the brain to the epigastrium, not from the epigastrium to the brain. No," he added, striking himself vigorously on the breast, "no, I am not a stomach made into a man! No, everything does not centre here. I have not the courage to say that if I have a healthy epigastrium, everything else is as it should be.—We cannot," he

continued, more mildly, "refer to the same physical cause and treat in one uniform way the serious troubles that attack different subjects with more or less violence. No two men resemble each other. We all have our own organs, diversely affected, requiring different nourishment, fitted to fulfil different missions and to develop the systems necessary for the carrying out of an order of things of which we know nothing. The particular portion of the great whole which, in obedience to an exalted will, produces and maintains in us the phenomenon of life, is shaped in a separate and distinct way in each man, and makes of him a being apparently finite, who, however, at one point coexists with an infinite cause. Therefore we must study each subject separately, penetrate his shell, ascertain in what his life consists and what his powers are. Between the softness of a wet sponge and the hardness of a pumice-stone there are innumerable shades of hardness. Such is man. Between the spongy constitutions of the lymphatic and the metallic strength of muscle of some men destined to live long, how many mistakes will always be made by the one implacable system of cure by beating down and prostrating the human forces which you suppose to be always irritated! In this case, therefore, I should advise a system of treatment entirely mental, a thorough examination of the man's inmost being. Let us seek the cause of the disease in the entrails of the mind, not in the entrails of the body! A physician is an inspired being, endowed with genius of a peculiar sort, to whom

God gives the power to read the human system as He gives to the prophets eyes to look into the future, to the poet the faculty of evoking nature, to the musician the faculty of arranging notes in harmonious order, whose type, it may be, is to be found on high!"

"Always his absolutist, monarchical, and religious system of medicine!" muttered Brisset.

"Messieurs," interrupted Maugredie, hastily covering Brisset's exclamation, "let us not lose sight of the patient—"

"So this is what science brings us to!" cried Raphael, sadly. "My cure wavers between a rosary and a chaplet of leeches, between Dupuytren's scalpel and Prince von Hohenlohe's prayer! On the line that separates facts from words, matter from mind, stands Maugredie suggesting doubts. The human *yes* or *no* pursues me everywhere! Always Rabelais's *Carymary, Carymara;* I am mentally ill, carymary! I am physically ill, carymara! Am I likely to live? they have no idea. Planchette was more honest than they, if nothing more, when he said: 'I do not know.'"

At that moment, he heard Doctor Maugredie's voice.

"The patient is a monomaniac, you say? agreed!" he cried; "but he has two hundred thousand francs a year; such monomaniacs are scarce, and we owe them an opinion at least. As for knowing whether his epigastrium has reacted on the brain or the brain on the epigastrium, we may, perhaps, be able to settle

that question when he's dead. Let us sum up, then. He is sick, there's no denying that. He must have treatment of some sort. Let us lay doctrines aside. Let us apply leeches to allay the intestinal irritation and the neurosis, as to the existence of which we are agreed, then let's send him to the waters: we will follow both systems at once. If he is consumptive, we can hardly hope to save him; and so—"

Raphael hastily left the hall and returned to his place in his easy-chair. The four physicians soon came out of the study; Horace acted as spokesman, and said:

"These gentlemen have unanimously agreed upon the necessity of an immediate application of leeches to the stomach and the urgency of treatment, both physical and mental. In the first place, a strict diet, in order to allay the irritation of your organs—"

At that point, Brisset made a gesture of approbation.

"In the second place, hygienic treatment to regulate your mental apparatus. Thus we unanimously advise you to go and take the waters, either at Aix in Savoie, or at Mont-Dore in Auvergne, if you prefer; the air and the scenery of Savoie are pleasanter than those of Le Cantal, but you may follow your inclination."

There Doctor Caméristus nodded his assent.

"These gentlemen," continued Bianchon, "having observed some slight impairment of the breathing apparatus, have agreed as to the propriety of my previous prescriptions. They think that your

cure may be effected readily, and will depend upon the wise alternation of these various methods. And—"

"And there's the whole cause and effect!" said Raphael, with a smile, as he led Horace into his study to hand him the price of that fruitless consultation.

"They are logical," the young doctor replied. "Caméristus feels, Brisset examines, Maugredie doubts. Has not man a soul, a body, and a mind? One of those three first causes acts within us with more or less force, and there will always be something of man in human science. Believe me, Raphael, we do not cure, we assist in curing. Between Brisset's system of medicine and that of Caméristus, there is the expectant system; but, in order to practise that successfully, one must have known one's patient ten years. At the bottom of medical science—and the same is true of all sciences—lies negation. So do your best to live prudently, and try a trip to Savoie; the best plan is and always will be to trust to nature."

*

One beautiful summer morning, a month later, on their return from the promenade, a number of the visitors at Aix were assembled in the salons of the Cercle. Sitting by a window, with his back to the company, was Raphael. He sat there for a long while, alone, buried in one of those involuntary reveries during which thoughts spring up in rapid succession and vanish without taking shape, passing through our minds like filmy, almost colorless clouds. At such times melancholy is sweet, joy is vague and ill-defined, and the soul is almost asleep. Abandoning himself to that sensuous life, Valentin bathed in the mild evening atmosphere, inhaling the pure, sweet-scented air from the mountains, happy because he felt no pain and had finally imposed silence on his threatening piece of shagreen. As the red glow of the setting sun faded away behind the mountain peaks, the air grew chilly and he left his seat, closing the window as he did so.

"Monsieur," said an old lady, "will you please not shut the window? We are stifling."

The words grated sorely on Raphael's ear because of the singularly shrill and discordant tone in which they were uttered; they were like the words rashly spoken by a man in whose friendship we would like to believe, and who destroys some sweet illusion by disclosing an abyss of selfishness. The marquis

bestowed on the old lady the unmoved glance of a sphinx-like diplomat, called a servant, and said to him sharply when he appeared:

"Open that window!"

At the words, every face betrayed great surprise. The company began to whisper together, looking at the invalid with expressions of more or less significance, as if he had been guilty of some serious impertinence. Raphael, who had not entirely laid aside his original timidity, had a feeling of shame; but he shook off his torpor, recovered his usual mental activity, and sought to explain the strange scene to himself. Suddenly a swift change took place in his brain, the past appeared to him with great distinctness in a vision, in which the causes of the feeling he inspired stood out in bold relief, like the veins in a dead body, whose most minute ramifications naturalists are able to color by some scientifically prepared injection; he recognized himself in that fleeting picture, followed the course of his life, day by day, thought by thought; he saw himself, not without surprise, gloomy and preoccupied in the midst of that cheerful company; always brooding over his destiny, engrossed by his disease, seeming to look with disdain upon the most harmless conversation, shunning the short-lived intimacies which travellers readily form, doubtless because they never expect to meet again; with little thought for others,—in fact, bearing a strong resemblance to the cliffs, that are as insensible to caresses as to the fury of the waves. Then, by a rare gift of intuition,

he read the mind of everyone present: as his eye fell upon an old man's sardonic profile and his skull, gleaming yellow in the candle-light, he remembered that he had won his money without giving him an opportunity to take his revenge; near by he noticed a pretty woman to whose seductions he had refused to yield; every face reproached him with one of those affronts, inexplicable to all appearance, the crime of which consists in an invisible wound inflicted on the self-esteem. He had involuntarily wounded all the petty vanities which circled about him. The guests at his entertainments and those to whom he had offered his horses were annoyed by his magnificence; surprised by their ingratitude, he had spared them that species of humiliation, whereupon they had concluded that he looked down upon them, and they accused him of aristocratic feelings.

By probing their hearts thus, he was able to detect their most secret thoughts; he had a horror of society, of its external courtesy, of its polish. Endowed with a superior mind, he was envied and hated; his silence baffled curiosity, his modesty seemed arrogance to those narrow-minded, superficial people. He divined the hidden, unpardonable crime of which he was guilty toward them; he had eluded the jurisdiction of their mediocrity. Rebelling against their inquisitorial despotism, he was able to do without them; to revenge themselves for that clandestine royalty, they had all instinctively banded together to make him feel their power, to subject him to a sort of ostracism, and to show him that they

could do without him. Moved to pity at first by that aspect of society, he soon began to shudder as he thought of the marvellous power that thus tore away for him the veil of flesh behind which the moral nature is concealed, and he closed his eyes in order to see no more. Suddenly a black curtain was drawn upon that menacing phantasmagoria of truth, but he found himself in the ghastly solitude that is the lot of all power and superiority. At that moment, he had a violent fit of coughing. Far from receiving any of the words, indifferent and hackneyed, to be sure, but which at least simulate a sort of polite compassion in a chance assemblage of well-bred people, he heard hostile ejaculations, and complaints muttered in undertones. The company no longer deigned even to pretend, so far as he was concerned, perhaps because he had fathomed them.

"His disease is contagious."

"The president of the Cercle ought to forbid his entering the salon."

"In well-regulated clubs, no one is allowed to cough like that, really."

"When a man's so sick, he ought not to come to the waters—"

"He'll drive me away!"

Raphael rose to escape the universal malediction, and walked through the rooms. He wished to find some protector, and he approached a pretty woman who was unoccupied at the moment, intending to address some flattering words to her; but as he drew

near, she turned her back on him and pretended to be looking at the dancers. Raphael feared that he had used his talisman already in the course of that evening; he felt neither the wish nor the courage to open the conversation, so he left the salons and took refuge in the billiard-room. There no one bowed to him or spoke to him or gave him a kindly glance. His naturally meditative mind revealed to him, by intuition, the not unreasonable cause of the general aversion he had aroused. That little world obeyed, perhaps unwittingly, the great law which governs the best society and whose inexorable moral system was displayed in its entirety before Raphael's eyes. A glance backward showed him its perfect type in Fœdora. He was not likely to meet with any greater sympathy for his physical ills from the one, than for his heart-sickness from the other. Good society banishes the unfortunate from its bosom as a man in robust health expels the germ of disease from his body. Society abhors pains and misfortunes, it fears them as it fears contagion, it never hesitates between them and vice: vice is a luxury. However majestic a disaster may be, society has the art of crying it down, of turning it to ridicule by an epigram; it draws caricatures in order to throw at the head of dethroned kings the insults which it thinks it has received from them; like the young Romans in the amphitheatre, it never forgives the fallen gladiator; it lives upon gold and raillery.—*Death to the weak!* is the motto of that equestrian Order, if we may call it so, which extends to all the nations on the earth,

for it is established everywhere by the rich; and that sentence is written in all hearts that are hardened by opulence or swollen by aristocratic ideas. Look at the children in a school. That miniature image of society—an image the more accurate in that it is more ingenuous and frank—always contains some poor serfs, creatures of pain and suffering, always on the border between contempt and pity; the Gospel gives them promise of Heaven.—Go lower down on the ladder of animate beings. If a fowl in the barnyard is in pain, the others peck at it, pluck it, and murder it. True to that policy of selfishness, society pours out its contumely upon the distresses that are bold enough to cast a shadow upon its merrymakings, to deaden its pleasures. Whoever is suffering in body or mind, whoever lacks cash or influence, is a pariah. Let him stay in his desert! if he oversteps its limits, he finds winter everywhere: frigidity of glance, frigidity of manner, of speech, and of heart; fortunate is he, if he does not reap insults where consolation should bloom for him!

Dying men, remain upon your deserted beds! Old men, abide alone by your fireless hearths! Poor, undowered maidens, freeze and burn in your solitary garrets! If, perchance, society does tolerate a misfortune, is it for any other purpose than to shape it for its use, to turn it to profit, to put a saddle-cloth and saddle upon it and a bit in its mouth, and mount it? to make it a source of amusement? Ye crabbed female companions, wreathe your faces

in smiles; submit to the caprices of your alleged benefactress; carry her dogs; amuse her, divine her secrets and hold your peace, ye rivals of the English griffins! And thou, king of unliveried servants, shameless parasite, leave thy character at home; digest as thy host digests, weep his tears, laugh his laughter, and applaud his epigrams; if thou wouldst speak ill of him, wait until his downfall. Thus society does honor to misfortune: it kills it or turns it out-of-doors, degrades it or emasculates it.

These reflections passed through Raphael's mind with the suddenness of a poetic inspiration; he looked about him and felt that ominous chill which society distils to keep misery at a distance, and which affects the heart more keenly than the icy blasts of December affect the body. He folded his arms across his breast, leaned against the wall, and fell into a profound melancholy. He thought how little happiness such vile guardianship conferred upon the world. What did it amount to? amusements without pleasure, gayety without cheerfulness, feasting without enjoyment, excitement without sensual gratification—in a word, wood or ashes upon a hearth, without a spark of fire. When he raised his eyes, he found that he was alone, the players had fled.

"I need do nothing more than reveal my power to them to make them adore my cough!" he said to himself.

At that thought, he threw contempt, like a cloak, between the world and himself.

The next day, the physician at the baths came to

see him, apparently with much kindly interest, and expressed some anxiety concerning his health. Raphael felt a thrill of joy when he heard the friendly words that were addressed to him. The doctor's face seemed to him to be stamped with gentleness and kindness, the curls of his light wig breathed philanthropy, the cut of his square-skirted coat, the folds of his trousers, his broad, Quaker-like shoes, everything, even to the semicircle of powder traced by his little pigtail on his slightly bent back, denoted a truly apostolic character, and expressed Christian charity and the self-sacrificing spirit of a man who, through zeal for the welfare of his patients, had forced himself to play whist and backgammon skilfully enough to win their money without fail.

"Monsieur le marquis," he said, after talking a long while with Raphael, "what I am about to say will, I have no doubt, put an end to your melancholy. I am sufficiently well acquainted with your constitution now to assert that the doctors at Paris, of whose great talents I am well aware, have fallen into an error as to the nature of your disease. Unless some accident happens, monsieur le marquis, you may live to be as old as Methuselah. Your lungs are as strong as a forge-bellows, and your stomach would put an ostrich's to shame; but if you remain in a rare atmosphere, you risk being deposited very speedily in holy ground. I can make myself understood, monsieur le marquis, in two words. Chemistry has established the fact that respiration in man causes a genuine combustion, the degree of its

intensity depending upon the abundance or scarcity of inflammatory elements stored up by the organism of each individual. In your case those phlogistic principles abound; you are, if I may be permitted the expression, superoxygenated by the ardent constitution of men destined to great passions. When you breathe the pure, keen air that quickens life in men whose fibres are relaxed, you accelerate still more a combustion that is already too rapid. One of the essential conditions of life for you, therefore, is the dense atmosphere of stables and valleys. Yes, the proper atmosphere to prolong the life of a man devoured by genius is found in the rich pasture lands of Germany, at Baden-Baden, or Toplitz. If you have no repugnance to England, its foggy atmosphere will moderate your incandescence; but these baths of ours, situated a thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean, are most unhealthy for you. Such is my opinion," he said, with a deprecatory gesture; "I give it against our interests, for, if you follow it, we shall have the misfortune to lose you."

Except for these last words, Raphael would have been taken in by the soft-spoken doctor's false kindliness; but he was too close an observer not to detect in the tone, the gesture, and the expression which accompanied that mildly satirical phrase, the mission with which the little man had evidently been entrusted by his light-hearted patients in convention assembled. Those florid-faced idlers, those bored old women, those wandering English people, those

dainty women of fashion escaped from their husbands and escorted to the waters by their lovers, undertook to drive away a poor, puny, feeble moribund, apparently incapable of resisting daily persecution! Raphael accepted the challenge, scenting amusement in the intrigue.

"As you would be so grieved by my departure," he replied, "I will try to profit by your good advice while remaining here. To-morrow I will give orders for the erection of a house in which we can modify the air according to your prescriptions."

Rightly interpreting the bitterly satirical smile that played about Raphael's lips, the doctor contented himself with bowing to him, and did not say a word.

The Lake of Bourget lies in a great cup between sharp-peaked mountains, wherein gleams a drop of water, bluer than any other water in the world, at an elevation of seven or eight hundred feet above the Mediterranean. Seen from the summit of the Dent-du-Chat, the lake resembles a lost turquoise. That pretty sheet of water is nine leagues around, and, in certain spots, nearly five hundred feet deep. To be in the middle of the lake in a boat, in fine weather, hearing nothing but the sound of the oars, seeing only the cloud-topped mountains on the horizon, and contemplating the dazzling snows of the French Maurienne; to pass in turn huge blocks of granite, arrayed in velvet by heather or dwarf shrubs, and laughing hillsides, on one side a desert, on the other a rich and fertile landscape, a poor guest at the rich man's dinner,—those harmonies and those

discords combine to produce a spectacle wherein everything is grand, wherein everything is small. The appearance of the mountains changes the conditions of optical effects and perspective: a fir-tree a hundred feet high looks to you a mere reed, broad valleys seem as narrow as mountain paths. That lake is the only place where one can confide in a friend, heart to heart. There one may think, there one may love. Nowhere on earth could you find a more perfect understanding between the water, the sky, the mountains, and the level fields. There are balms for all of life's sorrows. That spot keeps the secret of sorrow, consoles it, allays it, and imparts to love an indefinable touch of gravity, of tranquillity, which renders passion deeper and purer. A kiss becomes of increased importance there. But it is, above all, the lake of memories; it encourages them by tingeing them with the color of its waves, a mirror in which everything is reflected. Raphael could bear his burden nowhere but in the bosom of that lovely country-side; there he could live a life of indolence and reverie, without desires.

After the doctor's visit, he went out for a row upon the lake and was set ashore on a deserted point at the foot of a pretty little hill on which lies the village of Saint-Innocent. From that sort of promontory the view embraces the mountains of Bugey—at whose foot flows the Rhône—and the lower end of the lake; but Raphael loved to contemplate, from that point, the melancholy abbey of Haute-Combe on the other shore; the place of sepulture of the

kings of Sardinia, who lie prostrate at the foot of the mountains like pilgrims who have reached the goal of their pilgrimage. The regular, rhythmical plashing of oars broke the silence of the scene and gave it a monotonous voice like the psalmody of monks. Astonished to meet rowers in that part of the lake, which was usually deserted, the marquis, without emerging from his reverie, scrutinized the people who were sitting in the boat, and noticed at the stern the old lady who had addressed him so savagely the day before. When the boat passed Raphael, the lady's companion, a poor old maid of noble birth, whom he did not remember to have seen before, was the only one of its occupants who bowed to him. They soon disappeared behind the promontory, and he had already forgotten them, when he heard the rustling of a dress and the sound of light footsteps close beside him. He turned and saw the companion; from her constrained manner, he guessed that she wished to speak to him, and he walked toward her. She was about thirty-six years of age, tall and thin, angular and cold, and, like all old maids, her glance was embarrassed and in accord with a hesitating, constrained, inelastic gait. Old and young at once, she showed by a certain dignity of bearing the high price that she attached to her treasures and her perfections. She had, moreover, the discreet, monastic manner of women who are accustomed to take good care of themselves, doubtless that they may not fail to fulfil their destiny of love.

"Monsieur, your life is in danger, don't come to

the Cercle any more!" she said to Raphael, stepping back a few steps as if her virtue were already in danger.

"I beg you, mademoiselle," rejoined Valentin, with a smile, "explain yourself more clearly, since you have deigned to proceed thus far—"

"Ah!" she said, "had it not been for the powerful motive that brings me here, I should not have risked incurring madame la comtesse's wrath, for if she should ever know that I had warned you—"

"Who would tell her, mademoiselle?" cried Raphael.

"True," replied the old maid, glancing at him with blinking eyes, like an owl exposed to the sunlight. "But look to yourself," she added; "several young men who want to drive you away from the waters have agreed to insult you, to compel you to fight a duel."

The old lady's voice was heard in the distance.

"Mademoiselle," said the marquis, "my gratitude—"

His protectress had already made her escape upon hearing the voice of her mistress, who was still screeching among the rocks.

"Poor girl! the unfortunate always understand and assist one another," thought Raphael, as he sat down at the foot of a tree.

The key to all sciences is unquestionably the interrogation point; we owe the majority of great discoveries to the *How?* and it may well be that the wisest course to pursue in life is to put to one's self

on every occasion the query *Why?* But that artificial foresight destroys our illusions. Thus Valentin, having, without premeditated purpose to philosophize, taken the old maid's kind action for the text of his vagabond thoughts, found it running over with gall and bitterness.

"There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that a hired companion has fallen in love with me," he said to himself: "I am twenty-seven years old, I have a title and two hundred thousand francs a year! But that her mistress, who disputes the palm for hydrophobia with the cat tribe, should have brought her here, to my neighborhood, in a boat, is a strange and marvellous thing, is it not? These two women who have come to Savoie to sleep like marmosets and who ask at noon if it is daylight yet, must have risen before eight o'clock to-day to take the chance of finding me!"

Soon the old maid and her forty years' old ingenuousness became in his eyes a new transformation of that artificial, mischief-making society, a paltry stratagem, a bungling plot, the invention of some meddlesome priest or woman. Was the duel a fable, or did they simply want to frighten him? Insolent and irritating as flies, those narrow-minded creatures had succeeded in pricking his vanity, in arousing his pride, in exciting his curiosity. Resolved neither to be their dupe nor to be esteemed a coward, and amused, perhaps, by the little drama, he went to the Cercle that very evening. He stood calmly, with his back against the marble mantel, in the

centre of the main salon, watching himself closely in order to give no one any advantage over him; but he examined the faces of the company and in some sort defied them by his circumspection. Like a dog certain of his strength, he awaited the combat on his own ground, but without useless barking. Toward the close of the evening he walked through the card-room from the hall door to the billiard-room, where he glanced from time to time at the young men who were playing. After a few games, he heard his name mentioned by them. Although they spoke in undertones, Raphael readily guessed that he had become the subject of a discussion, and at last he overheard a few words that were uttered aloud.

"You?"

"Yes, I!"

"I dare you to do it!"

"Shall we bet?"

"Oh! he will go."

Just as Raphael, interested to know the subject of the bet, stepped forward in order to listen to the conversation more closely, a tall, strongly-built young man, of agreeable exterior but with the impertinent stare of a man who feels that he has some substantial support to depend upon, left the billiard-room.

"Monsieur," he said, calmly, addressing Raphael, "I have undertaken to tell you something that you do not seem to know: your face and your person are disagreeable to everybody here and to myself in particular.—You are too well-bred not to sacrifice

yourself to the general good, and I beg you to come no more to the Cercle."

"That jest, monsieur, which was made under the Empire in several garrisons, is considered very bad form in these days," retorted Raphael, coldly.

"I am not jesting," the young man replied. "I tell you again: your health is likely to suffer materially from your stay here; the heat, the light, the air of the salon, the crowd, will increase your trouble."

"Where did you study medicine?" queried Raphael.

"Monsieur, I received the degree of bachelor in shooting from Lepage in Paris, and of doctor from Cérisier, the king of the foil."

"You have one more degree to take," retorted Valentin; "study the code of courtesy and you will be a perfect gentleman."

At that moment, all the young men, some laughing, some silent, left the billiard-room. The card-players, becoming interested, left their cards to listen to a quarrel that gratified their passions. Alone in the midst of that hostile force, Raphael tried to retain his self-possession and not to put himself in the wrong in the slightest degree; but, when his antagonist indulged in a sarcasm in which an insult was enveloped with noteworthy incisiveness and wit, he gravely replied:

"Monsieur, it isn't permissible to-day to strike a man, but I do not know how to characterize conduct as cowardly as yours."

"Enough! enough! you can arrange matters to-morrow," said several young men, throwing themselves between the two champions.

Raphael left the salon, looked upon as the insulter, having agreed to a meeting near the Château of Bordeau in a small, sloping field, not far from a road recently built, by which the victor could reach Lyon. So that Raphael must necessarily keep his bed or leave the baths of Aix. Society triumphed. The next day, about eight o'clock in the morning, Raphael's adversary, followed by two seconds and a surgeon, came first upon the ground.

"We shall do very well here; the weather is superb for fighting!" he cried, gayly, looking up at the blue vault of heaven, and at the waters of the lake and the cliffs, without the slightest thought of fear or death.—"If I touch him on the shoulder," he continued, "I shall put him to bed for a month, eh, doctor?"

"At least," replied the surgeon. "But let that little willow alone; otherwise you will tire your hand and won't be master of your aim. You might kill your man instead of wounding him."

The sound of carriage-wheels became audible.

"Here he is," said the seconds, and they soon discovered a travelling carriage on the road, drawn by four horses and driven by two postilions.

"What a strange creature!" cried Valentin's adversary, "he is coming by post to be killed."

At a duel, as at the gambling-table, the slightest incidents exert great influence upon the imagination

of the actors who are deeply interested in the success of a shot or a game; so it was that the young man awaited with something like anxiety the arrival of the carriage, which remained in the road. Old Jonathas first alighted heavily and assisted Raphael to alight; he supported him with his feeble arms, lavishing upon him the minute attentions that a lover lavishes upon his mistress. They both disappeared in the paths between the high-road and the spot appointed for the duel, and did not reappear for a long time: they were walking slowly. The four spectators of that strange scene experienced profound emotion at the sight of Valentin leaning on his servant's arm: pale and weak, he walked like a man afflicted with the gout, with downcast eyes and not speaking. You would have said that they were two old men equally broken down, one by years, the other by thought; the first had his age written on his white hair, the younger was of no age.

"I have not slept, monsieur!" said Raphael to his opponent.

Those freezing words and the awful look that accompanied them made the real insulter shudder; he was conscious of his culpability and secretly ashamed of his conduct. There was something uncanny in Raphael's attitude, in the sound of his voice and in his gestures. He paused and the others imitated his silence. Uneasiness and intense interest were at their height.

"There is still time," he continued, "to make some slight reparation; do it, monsieur, or you must

die. You rely at this moment upon your skill, and do not recoil at the thought of a duel in which you believe the advantage to be all with you. But I am generous, monsieur, I forewarn you of my superior skill. I possess a terrible power. To turn your dexterity to naught, to draw a veil over your eyes, to make your hand tremble and your heart beat fast, to kill you even, I have simply to form a wish to that effect. I prefer not to use my power, for it costs me too dear. You would not be the only one to die. If you refuse to apologize, your ball will go into the water of yonder cascade despite your familiarity with assassination, and mine will go straight to your heart without my taking aim."

At that point, Raphael was interrupted by confused voices. While he was speaking, he had kept the unendurable brilliancy of his fixed gaze constantly upon his adversary, he had drawn himself up to his full height, with an impassive countenance like that of a dangerous madman.

"Make him keep quiet," the young man had said to one of his seconds, "his voice wrings my bowels!"

"Have done, monsieur.—Your harangue is useless," cried the surgeon and the seconds.

"Messieurs, I am performing a duty. Has this young man any arrangements to make?"

"Enough! enough!"

The marquis stood perfectly motionless, not for an instant removing his eyes from Charles, his adversary, who, dominated by an almost magic power, was like a bird in presence of a snake: compelled to

submit to that homicidal stare, he tried to avoid it but constantly returned to it.

"Give me some water—I am thirsty," he said to the same second.

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes," was the reply. "That man's eye burns and fascinates me."

"Do you want to apologize?"

"It is too late."

The two combatants were stationed fifteen paces apart. Each of them had taken a pair of pistols, and the programme of the ceremony provided that they were to fire two shots at will, after the signal was given by the seconds.

"What are you doing, Charles?" cried his second, "you are putting in the bullet before the powder!"

"I am dead!" was the muttered reply, "you have put me with my face to the sun."

"The sun is behind you," said Raphael, in a stern, solemn voice, as he loaded his pistol slowly, heedless of the signal already given and of the care with which his opponent was taking aim.

That superhuman security had about it something terrible that impressed even the two postilions, led to the spot by unfeeling curiosity. Playing with his power, or desirous to test it, Raphael was talking to Jonathas and looking at him when his adversary fired. Charles's bullet shattered a branch of the willow and skipped along the water. Raphael, firing at random, shot his adversary through the heart, and without paying the slightest heed to the young

ON THE ROAD TO LYON

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ADRIEN-MOREAU.

man's fall, he hastily took out the piece of shagreen to see what a human life cost him. The talisman was no larger than a small oak-leaf.

"Well, postilions, what are you looking at? Let us be off!" he said.

*

Arriving in France that same evening, he bent his steps at once toward Auvergne and the baths of Mont-Dore. During the journey, there suddenly passed through his mind one of those thoughts that fall upon the soul as a ray of sunlight falls upon some obscure valley through a rift in dense clouds. Melancholy gleams, pitiless glimpses into the future! they cast a bright light upon past events, lay our errors bare before us, and leave us without excuse before ourselves. He suddenly reflected that the possession of power, however great it may be, does not carry with it the knowledge of how to use it. The sceptre is a plaything for a child, an axe for Richelieu, and for Napoléon a lever with which to overturn the world. Power leaves us as we are and makes greater none but the great. Raphael might have done everything, he had done nothing.

At the baths of Mont-Dore he found the same sort of people, who shunned him with the eagerness with which animals fly from one of their kind lying dead on the ground, after scenting him at a distance. The detestation was reciprocal. His last adventure had instilled in him a feeling of profound aversion for society. So his first care was to find a place of refuge at some distance from the springs. He felt instinctively the need of drawing near to nature, of genuine emotion and of the aimless life which we are

so readily reconciled to lead in the country. On the day following his arrival, he climbed, not without difficulty, the Pic de Sancy, and explored the upper valleys, the aërial scenery, the undiscovered lakes, the rustic cottages of the Dore Mountains, whose wild and rugged charms are beginning to tempt the brushes of our artists. Sometimes he discovered lovely landscapes, full of charm and freshness, which formed a striking contrast to the forbidding aspect of those desolate mountains. Hardly half a league from the village, Raphael found a spot where nature, coquettish and merry as a child, seemed to have taken pleasure in concealing her treasures; at sight of that picturesque, unspoiled retreat, he determined to live there. There, existence might well be as peaceful, spontaneous, and fruitful as that of plants.

Imagine a cone standing on its apex, a cone of granite, deeply hollowed out—a sort of bowl whose edges were distorted by fantastic protuberances: here, flat surfaces without vegetation, smooth and of a bluish color, in which the sun's rays were reflected as in a mirror; there, cliffs seamed with fissures, wrinkled by ravines, from which depended huge blocks of lava, slowly undermined and prepared for falling by the heavy rains, and often crowned by gnarled trees twisted by the wind; and here and there were cool, dark slopes where clumps of chestnuts grew as high as cedars, or yellow grottoes with yawning dark mouths, fringed with brambles and flowers and with a narrow tongue of verdure in front. In the bottom of this bowl, once,

perhaps, the crater of a volcano, was a pond in which the water was as pure and sparkling as the diamond. About that deep basin, bordered with granite, with willows and mountain-ash and iris and myriads of aromatic plants then in flower, lay a plain as green as an English bowling-green; the fine, velvety grass was watered by tiny streams that flowed down through the clefts in the rocks, and fertilized by the vegetable matter that the storms constantly washed down from the high peaks into the valleys. The pond, whose shores were indented by irregular, tooth-like projections, as the hem of a dress is pinked, was something like three acres in extent. The plain varied from one to two acres in width as the rocks and the water approached each other or receded; in some spots there was hardly enough room for cows to pass. At a certain height, vegetation ceased. The granite above your head assumed the most grotesque shapes, and took on the vaporous tints which make lofty mountain peaks vaguely resemble clouds in the sky. Those bare, denuded rocks opposed to the pleasant aspect of the valley the wild and sterile image of desolation, avalanches to be dreaded, and such capricious shapes that one of the cliffs is called the *Capuchin*, it bears so strong a resemblance to a monk. Sometimes those needle-like peaks, those towering piles, those aërial caverns, were lighted up one after another, according to the course of the sun or the fancies of the atmosphere, and were dyed gold or purple, changed to bright pink, became

gray and dead. Those heights presented an ever-changing spectacle like the rainbow-hued reflections on a pigeon's throat. Often, at dawn or at sunset, between two tongues of lava that seemed to have been cleft asunder by a blow with an axe, a lovely shaft of light pierced to the bottom of that smiling, flowery bed where it sported about in the basin, like the golden ray that steals in through the chink of the window-shutter in a Spanish bedroom, carefully closed for the siesta. When the sun rose above the extinct crater, filled with water by some antediluvian upheaval, its rocky sides became heated, the old volcano took fire, and its quickly kindled warmth awoke the germs, quickened vegetation, colored the flowers, and ripened the fruit in that little unknown corner of the world.

When Raphael reached the spot, he discovered several cows feeding in the field; having walked a few steps toward the pond, he saw, just where the level tract was widest, a modest house built of granite and covered with wood. The roof of the cottage, in keeping with its location, was adorned with mosses, ivy, and flowers which indicated that it had been built many years. A thin column of smoke, of which the birds had ceased to be afraid, floated up from the ruined chimney. At the door was a wide bench between two enormous honeysuckles, red with blossoms and filling the air with perfume. The walls could hardly be distinguished under the vine-leaves and the garlands of roses and jasmine intertwined at random and without guidance.

Heedless of that rustic decoration, the occupants of the house took no care of it, but left to nature its frolicsome virgin grace. Baby-clothes were hung out to dry on a gooseberry-bush. A cat was lying on a hemp-peeling machine, and beneath it lay a newly-scoured yellow kettle in the midst of a heap of potato-skins. On the other side of the house, Raphael saw a hedge of dry bramble-bushes, intended, doubtless, to prevent the hens from pillaging the orchard and kitchen garden. The world seemed to come to an end there. The little house resembled a bird's nest ingeniously constructed in the cleft of a rock, a masterpiece of art and of negligence combined. It was an artless, kindly scene, genuine rusticity, but poetic, none the less, because it bloomed a thousand leagues from our artificial poesy, because it bore no analogy to any preconceived idea, but proceeded only from itself, a veritable triumph of chance.

When Raphael arrived, the sun was casting his rays from right to left, imparting greater brilliancy to the colors of the vegetation, bringing out in bold relief or adorning with fascinating effects of light and shade the gray and yellow background of the cliffs, the varying greens of the foliage, the blue, red, or white masses of the flowers, the climbing plants, the velvet moss of changing hue, the purple clusters of the heather, and, more than all, the transparent sheet of water, in which the granite peaks, the trees, the sky, and the clouds were faithfully reflected. In that lovely picture everything had its

lustre, from the glistening mica to the tuft of light-green grass hiding in the soft shadow; everything was pleasant to the eye: the spotted cow with the sleek, shiny coat, and the slender water-lilies stretched out like fringe and hanging over the water in a sheltered nook where azure or emerald-coated insects buzzed, and the roots of trees, which, like sand-strewn head-dresses, crowned a shapeless figure in stone. The warm odors of the water, the flowers and the grottoes, which filled that solitary retreat with perfume, caused Raphael a sensation that was almost voluptuous.

The majestic silence that reigned in that spot, omitted, it may be, from the tax-collector's lists, was suddenly interrupted by the barking of two dogs. The cows turned their faces toward the mouth of the valley, showed Raphael their moist muzzles, and resumed their browsing after gazing stupidly at him. Suspended among the rocks as if by magic, a goat and her kid were frisking about and finally took up their position on a slab of granite near Raphael, seeming to question him. The yelping of the dogs brought a fat child from the house, who stood in open-mouthed amazement, then came a gray-haired old man of medium stature. The two were in harmony with the locality, with the air, the flowers, and the house. Health overflowed in that rich and fruitful region, old age and infancy alike were lovely there; in short, there was in all those types of existence a primitive ease of manner, a monotonous happiness, that gave the lie to our philosophical

harangues and cured the heart of its turgid passions. The old man was of the type affected by the virile brush of Schnetz: his face was swarthy, with numerous wrinkles which looked as if they would feel hard to the touch, a straight nose, prominent cheek-bones veined with red like an old vine-leaf, an angular outline; all the characteristics of strength even after strength itself had disappeared; his hands still calloused, although they no longer labored, still retained a few white hairs; his attitude, that of a man really free, led one to think that in Italy he might have become a brigand from love for his priceless freedom. The child, a genuine mountaineer, had black eyes which could look at the sun without winking, a swarthy complexion, and uncombed brown hair. He was as quick and decided in his movements as a bird; as he was dressed in rags, his smooth white flesh could be seen through the gaps.

The two stood side by side, in silence, their minds filled with the same thought, presenting in their faces the proof of perfect oneness in their equally idle life. The old man had adopted the child's amusements, and the child the old man's humor, by a sort of compact between two forms of weakness, between a power nearing its end and a power about to spread its wings. In a moment, a woman of about thirty appeared in the doorway. She was spinning as she walked. She was an Auvergnese, with bright red cheeks, a cheerful, frank manner, white teeth, an Auvergne face, an Auvergne figure, an Auvergne dress and head-dress, the swelling bust of Auvergne,

and the Auvergne patois; a complete personification of the province,—laborious habits, ignorance, economy, cheerful disposition, all were there.

She bowed to Raphael and they entered into conversation. The dogs were quieted, the old man sat down on a bench in the sunshine, and the child followed his mother wherever she went, silent, but listening attentively and examining the stranger.

"You have no fear here, my good woman?"

"What should we be afraid of, monsieur? When we close the entrance to the valley, who can come in? Oh! we are not afraid! After all," she said, as she led the marquis into the principal room of the house, "what would thieves come here to steal?"

She pointed to the smoke-begrimed walls, which bore no other ornament than the highly-colored pictures in blue, red, and green, representing the *Death of Credit*, the *Passion of Jesus Christ*, and the *Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard*. Scattered about the room were an old four-poster walnut bed, a table with twisted legs, stools, a bread-box, a jar of salt, a stove, and bacon hanging from the rafters; on the chimney-piece were some plaster-figures, yellow and bright colored. As he left the house, Raphael saw among the rocks a man with a hoe in his hand, who was leaning forward, looking curiously at the house.

"That's the man, monsieur," said the Auvergnese, with the smile peculiar to women of the peasant class; "he's ploughing up yonder."

"And is this old man your father?"

"I ask your pardon, monsieur, but he's my man's grandfather. He's a hundred and two years old, as you see him. And not long ago he took our little fellow to Clermont afoot! He's been a strong man in his day! now he does nothing but sleep and eat and drink. He always likes to play with the little fellow. Sometimes the little one leads him off among the hills, but he goes just the same."

Valentin at once made up his mind to take up his abode with that old man and that child, to breathe the air that they breathed, to eat of their bread, to drink of their water, to sleep their sleep, to take their blood into his veins. The caprice of a dying man! To become one of the oysters clinging to that rock, to save his shell for a few more days by lulling death to sleep, was to him the standard by which to measure individual morality, the true theory of human existence, the *summum bonum* of life, the only life, the real life. His heart was filled with a profoundly selfish thought in which the universe was swallowed up. In his eyes, there was no longer any universe, the universe had become a part of him. To an invalid the world begins at his pillow and ends at the foot of the bed. That landscape was Raphael's bed.

Who has not, at least once in his life, watched the progress and movements of an ant, stuffed straw into the only opening through which a snail can breathe, studied the capricious antics of a slender dragon-fly, contemplated with admiration the thousand veins, colored like the rosework of a Gothic

cathedral, which stand out against the reddish background of an oak-leaf? Who has not gazed long with delight at the effect of the rain and sunshine on a roof of brown tiles, at the dew-drops, the petals of flowers, the varied shapes of their calices? Who has never plunged into one of those pleasant material reveries, indolent yet busy, purposeless yet leading to some thought? Who has not, in short, led the life of a child, the life of sloth, the life of a savage minus its toil? Such a life Raphael lived for several days, without care, without desire, conscious of a perceptible improvement, of an extraordinary sense of well-being, which calmed his anxieties, allayed his sufferings. He would climb the cliffs and sit upon some peak whence his eyes embraced a landscape of vast extent. There he would remain whole days like a plant in the sunlight, like a hare in its form. Or else, familiarizing himself with the phenomena of vegetation, with the vicissitudes of the weather, he would watch the progress of all nature's works, on the earth, in the water, in the air. He tried to associate himself with the inner life of the things about him, and to identify himself so completely with their passive obedience as to bring himself within the despotic and preservative law that governs instinctive existences. He did not wish to be burdened longer with responsibility for himself. Like criminals in the olden time who, when they were pursued by the officers of justice, were saved from arrest if they reached the shelter of the sanctuary, he tried to steal into the sanctuary

of life. He succeeded in becoming an integral part of that vast and powerful fructification: he had accustomed himself to the changes in the atmosphere, lived in all the hollows among the cliffs, learned the manners and customs of all the plants, studied the course of the streams, their beds, and made acquaintance with the beasts; in fact, he had become so perfectly one with that animate earth that he had in some sort grasped its thoughts and fathomed its secrets. To him, the infinite forms of all the kingdoms were different developments of the same substance, different combinations of the same movement, the mighty respiration of one immense being who acted, thought, walked, and grew, and with whom he desired to act and think and walk and grow. He had in imagination mingled his life with the life of those cliffs, he had planted himself there. Thanks to this mysterious illuminism,—a factitious convalescence, like the beneficent fits of delirium accorded by nature as respites from suffering,—Valentin experienced the joys of a second childhood during the early portion of his sojourn in that pleasant valley. He went about, busily occupied over trifles, undertaking a thousand things and finishing none, forgetting one day the plans of the day before; in his heedlessness he was happy, he believed that he was saved. One morning it happened that he remained in bed until noon, in the sort of half-waking, half-sleeping reverie that makes realities seem imaginary and gives to chimeras the vividness of reality, when suddenly, uncertain at

first if he were not still dreaming, he heard for the first time a bulletin of his health given by his hostess to Jonathas, who had come, as he did every day, to make inquiries concerning it. The Auvergnese evidently thought that Valentin was still asleep, and she had not lowered the tone of her mountaineer's voice.

"He ain't any better and he ain't any worse," she was saying. "He coughed again all last night as if he'd cough up his soul. He coughs and spits, the dear gentleman, till it breaks one's heart. My man and I wonder where he gets the strength to cough like that. It's horrible to hear him. What a damned disease he has got! The fact is, he ain't well at all! I'm always afraid of finding him dead in his bed some morning. He's just as pale as a wax Jesus! *Dame!* I see him when he gets up, and I tell you his poor body's as thin as a nail. And he begins to smell bad already, that's the truth! He don't care, he uses himself up running round as if he had health to sell. He's got lots of courage, I tell you, not to complain! But, honor bright, he'd better be under the ground than on top of it, for he's suffering the passion of Christ! I don't want him to go, monsieur, it wouldn't be for our interest. But even if he didn't give us what he does, I'd be fond of him, all the same: it isn't our interests that makes us look after him. Ah! my God," she continued, "it's only your Parisians that has such beastly diseases as that! Where do they get 'em, I'd like to know? Poor young man! it's sure that

he can't get over it. That fever, you see, is undermining him, wearing him out, ruining him! He don't suspect it, monsieur, he don't know it. He don't notice anything. You mustn't cry about it, Monsieur Jonathas! You must say to yourself that he'll be happy to be through with suffering. You ought to say nine days' prayers for him. I've seen some fine cures made by that, and I'd pay for a taper myself to save such a sweet, kind creature, a Paschal lamb—"

Raphael's voice had become so weak that he could not make himself heard, so he was obliged to listen to that ghastly chatter. At last, his wrath drove him from his bed and he appeared in the doorway.

"You old villain," he cried to Jonathas, "do you want to be the one to kill me?"

The peasant-woman took him for a ghost and fled.

"I forbid you," continued Raphael, "to have the least anxiety concerning my health."

"Yes, monsieur le marquis," replied the old servant, wiping away his tears.

"And you'll do very well, too, after this, not to come here without orders."

Jonathas started to obey; but, before taking his leave, he cast upon the marquis a faithful, compassionate glance in which the latter read his death-sentence. Discouraged, brought suddenly to a realizing sense of his true condition, Valentin sat down on the threshold, folded his arms across his breast, and hung his head. Jonathas, terrified, walked toward him.

"Monsieur—"

"Begone! begone!" cried the invalid.

During the morning of the following day, Raphael, having climbed the cliffs, had taken his seat in a crevice filled with moss whence he could see the narrow road leading from the springs to his place of abode. At the foot of the cliff, he saw Jonathas talking again with the Auvergnese. A malevolent power enabled him to interpret the woman's despairing gestures, the shaking of her head, her ill-omened frankness, and even wafted the fatal words to his ear in the silence. Horror-stricken, he took refuge on the highest summits, and remained there till evening, unable to banish the sinister thoughts so unhappily awakened in his heart by the cruel solicitude of which he had become the object. Suddenly the peasant-woman herself appeared before him like a ghost in the twilight; with a poet's odd fancy, he discovered in the black and white stripes of her skirt a vague resemblance to the dried ribs of a skeleton.

"The night-dew is falling, my dear monsieur," she said. "If you stay here, you won't get ahead a bit faster than rotten fruit. You must come home. It ain't healthy to breathe the dew, not to say that you haven't eaten anything since morning."

"By God's thunder, old hag," he cried, "I command you to let me live in my own way or I'll go away from here! It's bad enough to have you dig my grave every morning, I beg you not to search it every night."

"Your grave, monsieur! Dig your grave!—Where

is your grave? I'd like to know! I'd like to see you as active as our old grandfather and not in the grave! The grave! we always get into the grave soon enough—"

"Have done!" said Raphael.

"Take my arm, monsieur."

"No."

The sentiment that man finds it most difficult to endure is pity, especially when he deserves it. Hatred is a tonic, it helps a man to live, it arouses a thirst for vengeance; but pity kills, it makes our weakness even weaker. It is malevolence become coaxing, contempt in the guise of tenderness or tenderness in the guise of insult. It seemed to Raphael that he detected in the old man's manner a triumphant pity, in the child's an inquisitive pity, in the woman's a meddlesome pity, in her husband's a selfish pity; but, in whatever form that sentiment displayed itself, it was always big with death. A poet turns everything into a poem, awe-inspiring or cheerful according to the images that impress him; his exalted fancy rejects the soft shades and always selects the bright, vivid colors. That pity gave birth in Raphael's heart to a ghastly poem of mourning and melancholy. Doubtless he had not thought of the outspokenness of the natural feelings when he sought to draw near to nature. When he believed that he was alone under a tree, struggling desperately with an obstinate cough over which he never triumphed until he was utterly prostrated by the terrible conflict, he would see the bright, humid eyes of the

little boy, doing sentry-duty under a clump of bushes like a savage, and watching him with the childish curiosity in which there is as much mockery as pleasure, and an indefinable mixture of interest and indifference. The terrible *Brother, thou must die*, of the Trappists seemed constantly written in the eyes of the peasants with whom Raphael lived; he did not know which he feared the more, their ingenuous words or their silence; everything about them irritated him. One morning he saw two men dressed in black prowling around his neighborhood, who got scent of him and eyed him furtively; then, pretending that they had come there for a walk, they asked him divers commonplace questions which he answered briefly. He recognized them as the physician and the curé from the springs, sent doubtless by Jonathas; or else they had been consulted by his hosts or were attracted by the odor of impending death. Thereupon he seemed to see his own funeral, he heard the chant of the priests, he counted the tapers, and thenceforth he saw through a veil of crêpe the beauties of that fertile spot in whose bosom he thought that he had found life. Everything that had seemed to him a short time before to give promise of a long life now prophesied his speedy end. The next day he started for Paris, overwhelmed with the melancholy and cordially compassionate good wishes of his hosts.

After travelling all night, he awoke in one of the most charming valleys of the Bourbonnais, where the scenery and fine views passed before his eyes

as in a whirlwind, rapidly swept away like the misty images of a dream. Nature displayed her charms to him with cruel coquetry. Sometimes the Allier unrolled its glistening ribbon-like stream through the centre of a rich landscape, or a hamlet, nestling modestly in the depths of a defile of yellowish cliffs, showed its slender steeple; sometimes, after a monotonous succession of vineyards, the mills of a little valley suddenly appeared, and there were always festive châteaux, villages clinging to the hillsides, and roads bordered with majestic poplars; and last of all, the Loire and its long diamond-like expanse gleamed brightly where it flowed among its golden sands. Unending charms! Nature, animated and vivacious as a child, with difficulty holding in check the love and the sap that flow in June, exerted a fatal attraction on the invalid's dimmed eyes. He drew the blinds of his carriage and went to sleep.

Toward evening, after passing Cosne, he was awakened by merry music and found himself in the presence of a village fête. The post-house was near the square. While the postilions were changing horses, he watched the dances of the joyous peasants, the girls decked out with flowers, pretty and alluring, the young men full of life, and the faces of the elders ruddy with wine. The children were frisking about, the old women were laughing and talking together: everything had its voice, and innocent pleasure enlivened even the clothes and the tables laid in the open air. The square and the church presented a picture of happiness; the very

roofs and windows and doors of the village seemed to be making holiday. Like all dying men, impatient at the slightest sound, Raphael could not restrain a petulant exclamation, nor the wish to impose silence on the violins, to paralyze the activity, to deaden the uproar, to put an end to that insolent festivity. He entered his carriage, disgusted and weary. When he looked out on the square, he saw that joy had fled in dismay, the peasants were scattering, and the benches untenanted. On the stand erected for the orchestra a single blind musician was still playing shrilly on his clarinet. That music without dancers, that solitary old man with his unprepossessing profile and dishevelled hair, dressed in rags and half hidden in the shadow of a linden-tree, were like a grotesque image of Raphael's wish. The rain was falling in torrents, one of those heavy showers which the June clouds, charged with electricity, suddenly discharge upon the earth, and which end with equal abruptness. It came about so naturally that Raphael, noticing how the gray clouds were swept across the sky by a fierce squall, did not even think of looking at his piece of shagreen. He sank back in the corner of his carriage, which soon rolled out of the village.

The next day he was once more in his own house, in his own room, sitting by his own fireside. He had ordered a huge fire kindled, for he was cold. Jonathas brought him a package of letters. They were all from Pauline. He opened the first without haste and unfolded it as if it were the grayish paper

of a summons sent by the tax-collector. He read the first sentence:

"Gone! why, it seems like flight, my Raphael.—What! no one can tell me where you are? And if I do not know, who should know?"

Having no desire to read further, he coolly took all the letters and threw them into the fire, watching with a dull, unloving eye the antics of the flames as they twisted the perfumed paper, shrivelled it up, and gnawed its edges.

Fragments fell out upon the ashes, enabling him to see the beginnings of sentences, words and thoughts half-burned, with which he amused himself mechanically by reading amid the flames.

"Sitting at your door—expected—Caprice—I obey—Rivals—I, no, no!—your Pauline—loves—no more of Pauline then?—If you had intended to leave me, you would not have abandoned me—Eternal love!—To die—"

Those words awoke something like remorse in his heart: he seized the tongs and rescued the last remaining fragment of a letter.

"—I have murmured," Pauline wrote, "but I have not complained, Raphael! In keeping me at a distance, your purpose doubtless was to spare me the burden of some sorrow. Some day you will kill me, perhaps, but you are too kind-hearted to make me suffer. So do not, I beg you, go away again in this way. I can endure the most horrible torture, but only by your side. The sorrow you would impose upon

me would no longer be sorrow: I have in my heart even more love than I have ever shown you. I can endure anything except having to weep away from you and not knowing what has become—"

Raphael placed that charred fragment on the mantelpiece, then suddenly threw it into the fire. The paper was too vivid an image of his love and his fatal life.

"Go and find Monsieur Bianchon," he said to Jonathas.

Horace arrived, and found Raphael in bed.

"My friend," he said, "can you compound a draught for me with a little opium in it that will keep me in a constant state of drowsiness and still do me no harm?"

"Nothing easier," replied the young doctor, "but you must sit up a few hours during the day, to eat."

"A few hours?" Raphael interrupted him; "no, no! I do not want to sit up more than one hour at most."

"What is your plan?" queried Bianchon.

"To sleep is to live!" replied the sick man.—"Admit no one, not even Mademoiselle Pauline de Vitschnau!" said Raphael to Jonathas, while the doctor was writing the prescription.

"Well, Monsieur Horace, what chance is there?" the old servant asked the doctor, whom he escorted to the front door.

"He may live for some time yet, or he may die to-night. In his case the chances of life and death are about equal. I can't understand it at all," continued

the doctor, with a perplexed gesture. "He must be amused."

"Amused! you don't know him, monsieur: he killed a man the other day without saying ouf!—Nothing amuses him."

For some days, Raphael was constantly buried in the oblivion of his artificial sleep. Thanks to the material power exerted by opium upon our immaterial mind, that man of abnormally active imagination stooped to the level of those slothful beasts who lie inert in dense forests, in the guise of decaying vegetation, and will not take a step to seize an easy prey. He had even extinguished the light of Heaven, the daylight was carefully excluded from his room. About eight o'clock in the evening, he left his bed. Without any clear idea of his surroundings, he satisfied his hunger, then retired again at once. The cold, distorted hours brought him nothing but confused images, apparitions, faint shadows against a dark background. He was shrouded in utter silence, in an obstinate negation of action and intelligence. One evening he awoke much later than usual and did not find his dinner waiting. He rang for Jonathas.

"You are dismissed," he said. "I have made you rich, you will be happy in your old age; but I don't propose to let you play with my life any longer. I am hungry, you wretch! Where is my dinner? answer me!"

Jonathas smiled contentedly, and took a candle whose flame flickered in the profound darkness of the huge rooms; he led his master, who had become

a mere machine once more, into a long hall and abruptly opened a door. Raphael, bathed in light, was dazzled, amazed by an incredible spectacle. His chandeliers were filled with candles, the rarest flowers from his conservatory were artistically arranged about the room, the table gleamed with gold and silver plate, crystal and porcelain; a royal banquet, smoking hot, was already served, and the appetizing dishes tickled the sensitive nerves of the palate. He saw all his friends assembled, and among them lovely women in gorgeous attire, with bare necks and shoulders, flowers in their hair, sparkling eyes, beauty in diverse forms, seductively arrayed in alluring disguises: one had clothed her graceful form in an Irish jacket, another wore the wanton *basquina* of the women of Andalusia; a half-nude damsel represented the huntress Diana, another was modest yet voluptuous in the costume of Mademoiselle de la Vallière; both equally given over to debauchery. Joy and love and pleasure shone in the eyes of all the guests.

When Raphael's corpse-like face appeared in the doorway, a roar of acclamation burst forth, as unexpected and bewildering as the brilliant beams of that extemporaneous festival. The voices, the perfumes, the glare of light, the women with their penetrating beauty, assailed all his senses, aroused his appetite. Lovely music, concealed in an adjoining salon, drowned the uproar in a torrent of harmony and put the finishing touch to that strange vision. Raphael felt the lustful pressure of a hand, the hand of a woman, whose cool, white arms were

raised to embrace him, the hand of Aquilina. He realized that the picture was not unreal and fantastic like the fleeting pictures of his disordered dreams, he uttered a savage cry, sharply closed the door, and overwhelmed his old servant by striking him on the face.

"Monster, so you have sworn to kill me!" he cried.

Then, quivering with the thought of the danger he had escaped, he summoned strength to reach his room, swallowed a powerful soporific, and went to bed.

"What the devil!" muttered Jonathas, as he picked himself up; "Monsieur Bianchon certainly told me to amuse him."

It was about twelve o'clock. At that moment, by virtue of one of those physiological caprices which are the wonder and the despair of science, Raphael in his sleep was surpassingly beautiful. A bright flush mantled his white cheeks. His brow, as smooth as a girl's, was instinct with genius. Life seemed to be in full flower upon that calm and peaceful face. You would have said that it was a young child sleeping under its mother's protection. His sleep was a refreshing sleep, the breath that issued from his coral lips was regular and gentle; he smiled, transported doubtless in his dreams to happier days. Perhaps he was dreaming that he was a centenarian, perhaps his grandchildren were wishing him long life; perhaps, as he sat on his rustic bench in the sunlight, beneath the green leaves, he saw, as

the prophet saw from the mountain top, the promised land in the blessed distance!

"Here you are at last!"

Those words, uttered by a silvery voice, scattered the mist-veiled faces of his slumber. By the lamplight, he saw, sitting upon his bed, his Pauline,—but Pauline vastly improved by absence and by grief. Raphael lay back in utter stupefaction at sight of that face, white as the petals of a water-lily, and seeming even whiter in the shadow, framed as it was by long, black hair. Tears had left glistening furrows on her cheeks and were still clinging there, ready to fall at the slightest effort. Dressed in white, with head bent forward and hardly resting on the bed, she was like an angel from Heaven, like an apparition which a breath would cause to disappear.

"Ah! I have forgotten everything!" she cried, as Raphael opened his eyes. "I have no voice except to say to you: 'I am yours!' Yes, my heart is all love. Ah! never were you so beautiful, dear angel of my life. Your eyes are charged with lightning.—But I have guessed the whole story! You went away in search of health without me, you were afraid of me.—Oh, well—"

"Fly! fly! leave me!" exclaimed Raphael, at last, in a hollow voice. "Begone, I tell you! If you stay here, I shall die. Do you want to see me die?"

"Die!" she repeated. "Can you wish to die when I am not with you? Die! why, you are a

young man! Die! why, I love you! Die!" she added, in a deep, guttural voice, seizing his hands with a frenzied gesture.—"Cold!" she exclaimed. "Is it an illusion?"

Raphael drew from under his pillow the fragment of shagreen, tiny and fragile as the leaf of a periwinkle, and said, as he showed it to her:

"Pauline, lovely image of my days of happiness, let us say farewell!"

"Farewell?" she repeated, in surprise.

"Yes. This is a talisman which gratifies my wishes and represents my life. See how much of it remains. If you continue to look at me, I shall die."

The girl believed that he had gone mad; she took the talisman and carried it to the lamp. Her face illumined by the flickering flame that fell upon Raphael and the talisman as well, she closely scrutinized her lover's face and the last morsel of the magic skin. As he looked upon Pauline, made doubly beautiful by terror and by love, he lost all control of his thoughts; the memory of the loving scenes and delirious joys of his passion triumphed in his long-benumbed mind and awoke to new life like a fire but partially extinguished.

"Pauline, come!—Pauline!"

A terrible cry issued from the young woman's lips, her eyes dilated, her eyebrows, violently contracted by unheard-of agony, were drawn apart by horror; she read in Raphael's eyes a frenzy of passion, formerly her glory; but as his desire grew fiercer, the

skin contracted and tickled her hand. Without pausing to reflect, she fled into the adjoining salon and closed and locked the door.

"Pauline! Pauline!" cried the dying man, running after her, "I love you, I adore you, I want you!—I curse you, if you do not open the door! I want to die in your arms!"

With extraordinary strength, the last effort of life, he burst in the door and saw his mistress, half-naked, writhing on a couch. Pauline had tried in vain to tear her breast and was now endeavoring to strangle herself with her shawl, in order to kill herself speedily.

"If I die, he will live!" she said, striving to tighten the knot she had made.

Her hair was flying, her shoulders were bare, her clothes in disorder, and in that struggle with death, her eyes filled with tears, her face flushed, writhing in awful despair, she exhibited to Raphael, drunken with love, a thousand charms which increased his frenzy; he threw himself upon her with the lightness of a bird of prey, tore away the shawl, and tried to take her in his arms.

The dying man sought words in which to express the desire that was consuming all his strength; but he could produce nothing more than the choking sounds of the death-rattle in his chest, whence each breath that issued, more hollow than the last, seemed to come from his very entrails. At last, being no longer able to form articulate sounds, he bit Pauline in the breast. Jonathas appeared, terrified by the

cries he had heard, and tried to remove from the girl's arms the dead body over which she was crouching in a corner.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "He is mine, I have killed him; did I not predict it?"

EPILOGUE

"And what became of Pauline?"

"Oh! Pauline?—Have you sat sometimes, on a mild evening in winter, by your own fireside, dwelling with delight upon memories of love or of your youth, as you watch the inroads made by the fire on a log of oak? Here the flame outlines the red squares of a checker-board; there it produces a soft, velvety glow, tiny blue tongues run hither and thither, leap and play against the glowing background of the fire. There comes a strange painter who makes use of that flame; by a peculiar artifice, he draws in the centre of those violet or empurpled fiery tints a supernatural figure of incredible grace, a fleeting phenomenon which chance will never recreate: it is a woman with hair flying in the wind, whose profile is instinct with noble passion: fire within fire! She smiles, she fades away, you will see her no more. Adieu, flower of the flame! adieu, incomplete, unexpected essence, come too soon or too late to become a beautiful diamond!"

"But Pauline?"

"Do you not understand? I begin again. Room, room! She comes, she is here, the queen of illusions, the woman who flits by like a kiss, the woman brilliant as the lightning flash, and, like it, gleaming

hot from Heaven, the uncreated creature, all spirit, all love! She has put on a body of flame, or the flame has become for a moment animate for her! The outlines of her figure are of a purity that tells you that she comes from Heaven. Does she not shine resplendent like an angel? do you not hear the ethereal fluttering of her wings? Lighter than the bird, she alights close beside you, and her awe-inspiring eyes fascinate you; her soft but powerful breath attracts your lips by a magic force; she flies and draws you after, you are no longer conscious of the earth. You seek to pass but once your itching hand, your bewitched hand, over that snowy body, to touch her golden hair, to kiss her sparkling eyes. A vapor intoxicates you, enchanting music charms your senses. You quiver in every nerve, you are all desire, all suffering. O nameless bliss! you have touched that woman's lips; but suddenly an excruciating pain awakens you. Ah! your head has struck against the corner of your bed, you have kissed the brown mahogany, the cold gilding, a bronze ornament, a Cupid in copper."

"But Pauline, monsieur?"

"Again! listen. One fine morning a young man about to sail from Tours on the *Ville d'Angers* was holding the hand of a pretty girl in his. Thus united, they both gazed for a long time in admiration, across the broad stream of the Loire, at a white figure springing from the bosom of the mist like a child of the water and the sun, or like a caprice of the clouds and the atmosphere. Naiad and sylph in turn, that

vaporous creature flew hither and thither like a word vainly sought which flits through the mind but refuses to be grasped; she glided among the islands, she showed her head above the lofty poplars; and then, becoming colossal, she caused the thousand folds of her robe to glisten, or the halo described by the sun around her face to glow resplendently; she soared above the hamlets, above the hills, and seemed to forbid a steamboat to pass the Château d'Ussé. You would have said that she was the phantom of the Dame des Belles Cousines seeking to protect her country against invasion by modern ideas."

"Very well, I understand; enough of Pauline. But what of Fœdora?"

"Fœdora! oh! you will meet her constantly. Last night she was at the Bouffons, to-night she will go to the Opéra, she is everywhere. She is, if you like, society."

Paris, 1830–31.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The time at which this Study opens is given in the text as the close of October, 1829; but the many references made to the July Revolution, in the events described as happening on the same day as that of the opening event, would seem to indicate that the time should be October, 1830.

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